Smarthinking Writer's Handbook

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Analyzing the Prompt

Sitting and staring at a prompt with a knot in your stomach may be a familiar scenario. The prompt, also called directions, instructions, or requirements, is the key to a successful essay. Analyzing the prompt will help you understand what your instructor expects for the assignment so that you can meet (or exceed) those expectations. Here's how to do it:

Tap into T-A-P: Topic—Audience—Purpose

Topic
The topic for your assignment could be general or specific. See some examples below:

General Topics	Specific Topics
A memorable experience	A time when you realized someone you care about had changed
The environment	How recycling reduces pollution
The Civil War	The historical significance of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address
A Shakespearean play	The effect of power on characters in *Macbeth*

As you read the prompt, consider whether your assigned topic is general or specific. If it's a general topic, you'll usually need to narrow your focus to a specific subtopic to avoid taking on too much. In the topic table above, each specific topic would work as a subtopic for the corresponding general topic. If the prompt topic is specific, make sure you stay on topic throughout your writing assignment so that you meet the assignment requirements. If your instructor has included several questions or steps in the prompt, make sure you answer all questions or address all elements included.

Audience
The audience is the person or group of people to whom your writing assignment is addressed. Often for college papers, your audience will be your instructor, the general reader, or your peers/classmates. To see more on this topic, check out the discussion of Audience Types.

- **Instructor as Audience:** When writing a paper with your instructor as audience, take his or her views about the topic into consideration. This doesn't mean you have to agree with your instructor, but if you oppose your instructor's view, consider how you'll support this opposing viewpoint. Instructors want students to be informed and credible in their writing.
- **General Reader as Audience:** If you're writing for the general reader, consider what you know about the topic that the average person might not know. What background information do you need to provide for context? Are there words or terms you need to define for a general reader?
- **Peers/Classmates as Audience:** When writing for this audience, consider that not all your classmates may share the same view. What are the differing views on the topic? What background information do your classmates need to understand your view?

Purpose
Purpose refers to the approach you take with your topic and audience in mind. The words below are the keys to finding the purpose of your prompt:

- **Describe:** Use vivid sensory details to give your reader a mental picture of the scene, person, event, or object you're writing about.
- **Define:** Give examples and explanations to define a word or idea in-depth. Definition essays sometimes also explain what the word or idea isn't and why.
- **Cause and Effect:** Explain how one action causes another action to happen; alternatively, state the effects of a specific cause and explain why these effects occur.
- **Process:** Explain why something happens or how to do something, incorporating multiple steps in the essay body.

- **Classification/Division**: Separate a general category into multiple subcategories, and explain how the subcategories are different from each other.
- **Compare and Contrast**: Explain the similarities and/or differences between two ideas, topics, or items. You may need to state which of the two is better for the intended audience based on your comparisons and contrasts.
- **Argue**: Take a stance on an issue with at least two sides. State your case, often using supporting sources to back up your stance.
- **Persuade**: An argument essay that goes one step further, convincing your audience to take a specific action.
- **Illustration/Exemplification**: Use details and examples to support the main point of your essay. The essay may focus on just one example or one example per body paragraph.
- **Literary Analysis and Explication**: Analyze one or more elements of a literary work (book, short story, poem, play) to explain the work's significance. Literary analyses highlight specific parts of the work (setting, character, symbols, etc.), while explication breaks down the work sentence-by-sentence or line-by-line.
- **Analyze**: Break down a work to highlight its strengths and weaknesses. While an analysis should include enough summary for context, the bulk of the essay should focus on explaining what the strengths and weaknesses are.
- **Evaluate**: Determine whether a work is effective or ineffective. Like analyses, the majority of the essay should focus on explaining why the work is effective or ineffective. Only include as much summary as needed for context.

Mark Up the Prompt

A great way to analyze the prompt is to make notes in the margins—either by hand or on your computer. Here's an example prompt that includes some example margin notes:
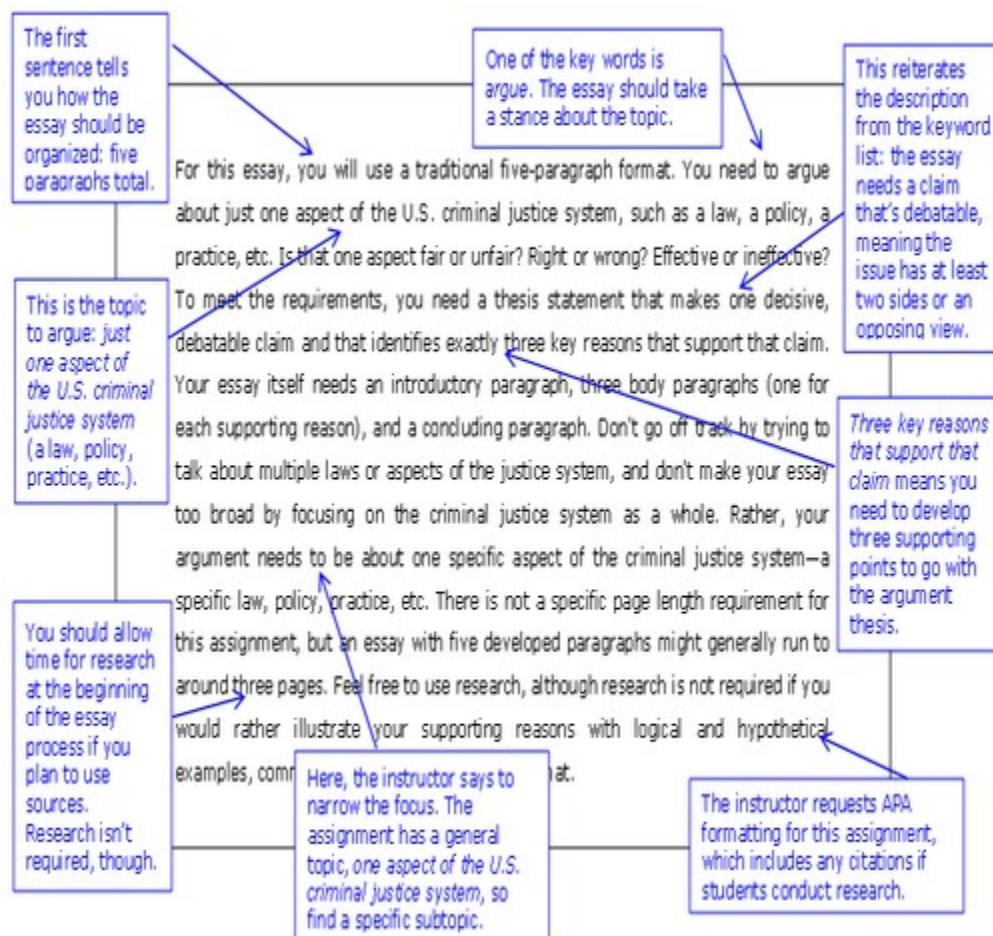
Note Additional Elements
Pay attention to any additional elements you may need in your assignment, such as:

- **Outside Sources:** Do you need to include outside sources? If so, how many? Which types of sources are required—books, journals, websites? Noting this will help you schedule research time.
- **Length and/or Specific Sections:** Is there a length requirement for the paper—either words or pages? Typically, the average word-processing page is about 250-300 words when using a 12-point font, one-inch margins, and double-spacing. Does your instructor require specific sections for your paper? What should be included in those sections?
- **Formatting:** Which font and font size are required? Do you need to cite sources in MLA, APA, or another style? Do you need a separate title page?
- **Due Date:** How much time do you have to complete the assignment? The amount of time can help you understand the depth and quality expected; an essay due tomorrow won't need the same in-depth focus as an essay due in six weeks.

Think About It

- What is my T-A-P: Topic? Audience? Purpose?
- What key words are in my prompt to help me figure out the purpose for this assignment?
- What notes can I make on the prompt itself to help me better understand the assignment?
- What are the additional requirements, such as outside sources, length, specific sections, formatting, and due date?

Analyzing the prompt is the first step in successfully completing a writing assignment since your analysis will help you understand what your instructor expects. Good luck!

Writing a Narrative

Chapter 1: Section 2, Lesson 1

Sometimes authors use memorable experiences from their own lives to tell stories that entertain or teach the reader values and life lessons. Many assignments will ask you to remember and write about something from your past, and some assignments will require that you tell a story about yourself or someone else in order to make a point. You might also end up creating a journal or diary entry to record events and observations. If so, you could draw from this entry when you write about your memories or experiences, helping you to develop a compelling story.

Certain Characteristics Make Narratives Unique
A narrative's purpose is wrapped up in its storytelling and in its main idea. In fact, effective storytelling is crucial to composing a strong narrative. To tell the story in a way that keeps readers engaged and interested in the reading, make sure to incorporate the following techniques:

- Tell a story with an introduction, a plot (including setting and characters), a conflict and/or climax, and a resolution/conclusion
- End with a summary or conclusion that points out why the narrative is significant or important, how the conflict was resolved, or what was learned from it
- Use concrete (or physical/tangible) and sensory (based on sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell) details to involve the reader—specific language evokes specific emotions
- Imply the main idea (unless your instructor says otherwise) rather than state it directly in a thesis
- Show readers your ideas rather than directly tell them what happened
- Use first person—*I* or *we*—in dialogue or because you're writing from your perspective, in the first person point of view
- Write in the past tense to show completed actions

Before You Start to Write
For many writers, the narrative essay is the easiest form of writing. After all, writing a narrative is nothing more than remembering and telling a story to someone—something that happens in everyday conversation. Consider these tips for finding a topic for your narrative:

- Pretend you're telling the story to a friend or a relative and write as though you're talking
- Speak into an audio recorder, perhaps by using an app on your phone or some other device, and tell the story orally at first
- Include plenty of details and describe situations and people fully so that your readers can picture the memory you're writing about
- Don't worry about organization, grammar, spelling, or punctuation at first—just get the basic story written down

After exploring your initial thoughts and gathering applicable details, you can consider what your main idea may be and keep it in mind while composing a first draft.

Writing the Narrative
Your readers will appreciate the story you tell in your narrative, but they'll need you to develop the *situation, conflict, struggle, outcome,* and *meaning* to understand the story's importance.

- **Situation:**   Explaining the background for why something happens is called defining the situation. Giving basic details, such as those related to time, setting, and place, will not only get your readers acquainted with your situation but can also help build interest in the narrative's plot. A narrative about realizing that you have a love for baking, for instance, could begin with background material about the kitchen in your childhood home and the age you were when you first started to bake.
- **Conflict:**   Once you've established the situation, move on to the conflict that it creates in you.

Try thinking of conflict as friction that must be resolved by some action. You can share the friction as part of your opening paragraph, but wait until the body of the essay to discuss the event itself. Many narratives include a hint about this friction at the end of the introduction, letting readers know the conflict is coming. The end of the introduction for the narrative on baking might say *I never imagined my younger sister would wear my newfound fascination on her wrist for the rest of her life.*

- **Struggle:**   The main part of your narrative will be the story itself. Depending on your assignment prompt, you may write two, three, or four paragraphs, or even more. In these paragraphs, you'll explain what happened as you struggled through the experience. You can use several techniques to tell your story. For example, you can use your own perspective, focusing only on your perceptions and feelings during the time of the story. When you describe places, actions, or people, create images based on your own senses to tell the readers what you experienced or felt. If you include dialogue, mention only the important lines people said instead of recording every action and word. Showing rather than telling is also very important. Telling readers something is like repeating a story you've heard or reporting on something you've witnessed. Instead of saying, for example, *My sister became more and more excited as we worked together on the muffins,* the narrative could show her excitement by using active verbs, nouns, and adjectives: *Every time I asked her to find another ingredient, she bounced happily over to where it was in the kitchen, hopping like a baby frog along the shoreline of a lake.* More information on showing instead of telling is found in [Figurative Language](#).

- **Outcome:**   Once you've described the conflict and struggle, you'll need to explain the outcome. This explanation is the resolution of the conflict and struggle and is also known as the climax; it's the central event that became pivotal in your understanding of what was taking place. The climax can inspire you to change something about yourself or do something you'd never imagined yourself doing before. It may be something thrilling, frightening, or seemingly disastrous. It could also be surprising or unexpected. For example, if the baking story ends with the sister getting seriously burned on her wrist while trying to snatch a muffin from the hot oven, readers will sit up and take notice, wondering what the writer learned about being a baker from the whole experience. That kind of unexpected outcome allows you to offer a brief discussion of what happened after the main event or situation and perhaps a summary sentence about what's taken place since. By including an outcome, you give readers closure. That is, you don't leave them asking, *What happened next?*

- **Meaning:**   The final section of your narrative will explain what you think is important about this incident or event. This is one place where it's easy to forget that you aren't writing a moral outcome for the whole world. It's much more personal than that. What did *you* learn from this situation? Readers seldom expect a narrative to provide overall advice about how they should live or the world should change. A good way to be sure that you're staying focused on yourself and your experience is to check the last paragraph for words like *people* and *you.* If you find these words, omit them and move back to your story and experience.

Narratives Need Structure
Although narratives have a familiar essay-like outline, the content in each section of a narrative contrasts its more traditional counterparts:

Introduction
A narrative benefits from a strong introduction, which should include enough background material to set the tone for the discussion and guide readers to think about the story's purpose. After reading the introduction, readers shouldn't be wondering if the story will have importance or impact. As noted above, many narrative introductions end with a line that previews the main event in the story. It's sometimes referred to as a hint of what's to come, or a forewarning. It is not, however, a thesis.

Body Paragraphs
Because a narrative is like a story, it often helps to think along a chronological timeline. Since the story or narrative will present an event from the past, you could build your story from the earliest related date and bring it closer and closer to the present time, keeping the details organized. The chronological approach could be based on years if the story spans a significant amount of time, or even days or hours if the events are more condensed. On the other hand, you could start the story in the present time and then use a series of "flashbacks" to tell the story as it happened in the past. Sometimes using flashbacks can help to tell a more engaging story, but this technique must be used carefully; switch tense as clearly as possible when jumping in and out of the flashback(s). To move the story along,

whether using a chronological approach or a flashback, rely on transitions related to time. Words like *now, as, start, next, soon, after, later, then, when,* and *following* will move readers from one idea to the next effectively.

For content, the body paragraphs should build on ideas in relation to the main event or the lesson you learned from that event. Details are a key ingredient to a strong narrative; if there aren't enough concrete details, readers probably won't find the story relevant. Details are the tools narrative writers use to draw pictures, like paints and brushes for a painter. While there may be many vivid details of an event in your memory, such as the list of all of the tools *and* ingredients needed to bake the muffins, be selective. Choose only those details that are important to the story's point.

Conclusion
The conclusion offers a chance for you to reflect on the experience shared in the story and especially on the climax. It should be the area where you find significance in the experience and make that significance applicable to your readers. In fact, the conclusion is usually the most direct area in a narrative because it shares changes that have taken place, realizations that have occurred, and/or lessons you have learned as a result of what took place: *As my sister sat there crying, I became determined to go to pastry school. After all, if my hobby made her that curious, then it must be something worth pursuing!*

Narratives Do Not Have Traditional Thesis Statements
Because a narrative is a story and because that story has a larger purpose or meaning, you have a certain freedom when writing. Composing a traditional thesis for a narrative paper can be challenging, so don't feel like you must include a three-point thesis at the end of the narrative's introduction. Do pay close attention to the assignment description since your instructor may specify whether or not you should place the thesis at the end of the introduction, as in a traditional essay, or be a little more free-form, as with an implied thesis. When a thesis in a narrative is implied, try thinking of it as a "moral to a story" or as a lesson you learned. Usually, this moral or lesson comes in the conclusion, but you can use a variety of tools to reinforce it throughout the body. Symbols, dialogue, repetition, metaphors, and concrete and sensory details can all provide subtle hints in the storyline, reminding readers of the conflict you warned about at the end of the introduction, all of which will show and eventually confirm the moral you'll share in the conclusion.

Think About It

- What seems to be the moral to your story or the lesson you learned?
- What elements or tools are used (or might be used) to help readers imply this lesson?
- How will the reader understand that the lesson has indeed been learned?

Narratives are more free-form than traditional essays, and including creative elements and details like hints, symbols, images, and dialogue to reinforce the moral or lesson will show your readers how far you've come as both a person and a writer.

Writing a Memoir

Chapter 1: Section 2, Lesson 2

Memoir essays are sometimes confused with narrative essays, but they shouldn't be. While a narrative essay focuses on telling a structured story about a true event or experience, a memoir often has access to a broader set of tools and topics. Despite what many people think, you don't have to have led a long, eventful life to write a memoir, and a memoir does not need to be the length of a book. Instead, memoir writing is defined by choice of topic and the way in which the writing approaches that topic.

Technique

While memoirs often deal with broad time periods, the form itself is not ambiguous or undefined. Certain features unite memoirs, whatever their length or topic.

- A memoir has flexibility in its approach to time. It might address a single event or experience, so some memoirs resemble narrative essays. However, a memoir might just as well address a broad time period rather than a narrow timeframe. For example, a memoir might discuss the weeks and months after the writer experienced a significant loss or the first few years after the writer moved away from home for the first time. A memoir might seek to reflect on how the writer's college years still influence her life thirty years later: *The names of certain authors still convey the feeling of those last two months of college, when the lilacs were blooming along the steps up to the English Department.*
- Memoir has a wide variety of tools at its disposal. It can use dialogue, flashbacks, anecdotes, sensory description, personal reflection, and other techniques.
- Memoir can address the experience in layered ways. While a memoir may simply narrate an experience, it might also relay the experience in a rich way through reflection on the significance of the experience and its association with or connection to other periods in the writer's life. A memoir might explore unspoken connections between the writer's past and future, or connections between apparently unrelated people in the writer's life.
- Memoir usually does not need to follow a strict chronological order. For example, a memoir might begin by describing an experience in the present tense, then reveal that the experience happened thirty years ago, and finally reflect on that experience. Remember—a memoir doesn't need to follow set rules about relaying experience. A memoir might simply reflect on the last two years of the writer's life, or it might look much further back. A memoir might move back and forth in time, touching on different time periods, people, and places in the writer's life to reflect on a common meaning or significance.
- Most importantly, memoir is as much about the writer's experience of the memory and interpretation of the memory now, today, as it is about the experience or time to which the memory refers. A memoir will often deal with a specific memory, but it will just as often address how that memory has been warped by the passing of years or been inflected with more recent experience.

Picking a Topic

When writing a memoir, you should choose a memory or time that means something to you. This need not be an experience that changed your life or even one that changed your view of the world, but it should be a memory or time that stands out among others in your life. Maybe you lived in a new place for the first time or spent a lot of time alone one summer; maybe you met someone unlike anyone else you had known before or did something that still affects the way you live now. For whatever reason, and for whatever emotion—happy, sad, vulnerable, ecstatic— the time or memory you write about is likely to be infused with a distinct feeling and a certain set of impressions and emotions that have lived on despite the passage of months or years.

Essay Structure

Your essay will depend largely on the assigned instructions or your writing goals. If you are writing a memoir essay for a class, then you will want to pay careful attention to any assignment guidelines, such as essay length requirements, suggested topics, the focus of the draft (whether broad or narrow),

level of detail, and so on. If you are writing for yourself or for publication, then consider your own goals and time allotted to determine the length and scope of your draft.

Introduction
Your introduction should usually give readers some sense of the memory, time, and place you will write about, but given the highly variable structure of the memoir genre, there is no right way to draft an introduction; in other words, there are many appropriate and acceptable ways. If your memoir begins by relaying an experience in the present tense, the introduction might relay the experience *in medias res*, i.e., in the middle of the action; for example, a memoir could begin by relaying the last day of college in detail, then shift to discussing a broader time period, such as the several years the writer spent living in France after graduation. An introduction could begin by describing a person, object, or feeling associated with the experience or memory, or it could begin by describing something in the present that has a connection to the past: *After graduation, I left not only my English major behind but English itself; I moved to France and began working for an art publisher.*

Essay Body
The structure of the essay body will largely depend on your topic and goals. Whether the memoir reflects on the distant past, moves back and forth in time and across geography, or focuses on a single moment in time, the essay should use paragraphs effectively to convey each memory.

Just like any other essay, each body paragraph should focus on one idea or topic, such as an aspect of the memory, and each topic sentence should give the reader some idea of what the paragraph will discuss: *"And palmeres for to seken strange strondes"—I would come to think of those words again and again, not only as I walked across the graduation platform, but in the years and decades after that day.*

However, since memoirs often address hidden connections between experiences, submerged and implicit ideas, and emotions, topic sentences for the body paragraphs need not be explicit; in fact, given the reflective tone of many memoirs, the explicit topic sentences that function well in most academic essays may come across as heavy-handed and awkward in most memoir writing. With that in mind, a topic sentence might hint at its topic without addressing it directly.

Conclusion
A memoir's conclusion will in some way emphasize, reflect on, or connect to the memory or experience discussed in the body of the essay. This could mean that the conclusion simply reflects on the experience in a brief way, but a memoir need not follow this traditional approach. A memoir's conclusion could briefly relay a recent experience as a way of illustrating how the writer's life has changed since the original experience, or a conclusion might begin by emphasizing the memoir's topic to the writer's life now: *Only in the last six months have I realized where I finally found that "stronde," that strip of sand along some forgotten shore.*

Think About It

- What memory, time, or experience in your life seems to draw your attention months, years, or decades later?
- Which feelings, thoughts, or ideas recur again and again when thinking of that memory?
- Why do you think that memory continues to mean so much to you?

Writing a Descriptive Essay

Chapter 1: Section 2, Lesson 3

Imagine you're catching up with a friend who wants to know more about your new car. You tell him, "It's a great car—good on gas and quick to move." "That's nice," says your friend, "but tell me more!" After you describe the sapphire blue paint, the leather seats, and the sunroof, your friend begins to understand just exactly why this new car is special. Descriptions help people share important parts of their lives with others. In a writing class, the instructor may ask you to write a descriptive essay about one specific person, place, or object. The goal is to describe the topic so vividly that readers can really imagine it. In some cases, the instructor will assign a specific topic for you to describe, such as a landmark on campus. Other assignments require you to choose a person, place, or thing that you know really well and to show your readers how or why your topic is special or significant. For example, you might be asked to describe a unique person, a place you recently visited, or an object that holds sentimental value. Occasionally, instructors will use the term *description* for an essay about an event, which is also known as a *narrative essay.* For information about these types of essays, see Writing a Narrative.

Essay Structure

Like most essays, descriptive essays include an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Usually, each body paragraph focuses on a different characteristic of the topic, so it's a good idea to brainstorm the characteristics you want to describe before your first draft. One way to begin working on a descriptive essay is to ask yourself these questions:

- What main idea do you want to illustrate about the person, place, or thing you're describing?
- What are the most noticeable or significant aspects of your topic?
- Which aspects best prove your main idea?

You can use these types of questions to brainstorm possible body paragraph topics and to make a list of those topics before writing. For example, before writing about a garden, you might plan this kind of outline:

   I.   Introduction
  II.   First aspect: the colorful flowers
 III.   Second aspect: the sculptures
 IV.   Third aspect: the bees and butterflies
  V.   Conclusion

In this outline, each Roman numeral represents one paragraph topic. This plan includes topics for three body paragraphs, but the length can vary depending on the assignment and topic. Check the instructions for clues about the number and types of characteristics you should describe.

Introduction Paragraph

Most descriptive essays begin with an introduction paragraph that familiarizes readers with the topic. The introduction usually helps readers understand what you'll describe and why the topic is relevant. It might explain why the topic is important to you personally or how your topic is relevant to people in general. Introductions to descriptive essays tend to answer the following types of questions:

Person	Place	Thing
- Which person is special to you? - What is your connection to this person?	- What place is significant and important? - What is the place mostly used for? - Who tends to use it?	- Which object is significant? - What type of object is it? - Where did the object come from?

• Where does the person live? • What is the person's main occupation or role?	• Where is the place located?	• What is the object used for?

Thesis Statement
You'll usually need to include a thesis statement in your descriptive essay. Although each assignment varies, the thesis usually gives your overall impression of the topic, perhaps listing the aspects or characteristics you plan to discuss in the body paragraphs. Here are a few examples of thesis statements for descriptive essays.

- **Person:** *My best friend Rayna is especially fascinating because of her creative fashion sense, hilarious sense of humor, and adorable mannerisms.*
- **Place:** *The nature preserve is one of the most relaxing and peaceful places on campus because of several characteristics.*
- **Object:** *My favorite bracelet has a lot of value and meaning because of the design, colors, and engravings.*

Each thesis includes an overarching main idea about the topic. The first and third thesis statements include a list of body paragraph topics as well.

Topic Sentences
The body paragraphs in a descriptive essay usually begin with clear topic sentences to help readers understand how the ideas are structured. The topic sentence usually identifies the aspect you plan to discuss in the paragraph, and the supporting details describe this characteristic with specific information. For example, the following topic sentence would begin a body paragraph in an essay about a garden:

One of the most relaxing and enjoyable aspects of the garden are the flowers.

Because the topic sentence focuses on the garden's flowers, you can only include details about flowers —their appearance, smell, texture, and so on—until the next body paragraph.

Supporting Details
The supporting details in a descriptive essay do most of the describing. To successfully show readers what the topic is like, each body paragraph usually needs several vivid and clear details. Many descriptive assignments ask students to do more *showing* than *telling,* as seen here:

Telling: *For Halloween last year, Rayna had the most outrageous "Oscar the Grouch" costume.*
Showing: *She spray painted her dreadlocks green and pinned them into a messy nest on top of her head, and she used suspenders to attach a metal, bottomless trashcan to her shoulders. She made it look as if the can was full of trash by taping banana peels, empty chip bags, and wadded paper towels to the top edges.*

As you can see, showing requires you to use sensory details about the five senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch). For example, to describe flowers, you might consider

- The color, shape, and appearance of the flowers
- The smell of the flowers
- The sound of the flowers moving in the breeze
- The texture of the flowers and leaves on the fingers
- The taste of the nectar from a honeysuckle blossom

It may not be possible to use all five senses in each body paragraph, but definitely try to use them while you brainstorm. Depending on what you're describing, some of the senses will be more

appropriate than others.

Conclusion Paragraph
The conclusion paragraph is a chance to revisit the thesis statement, reminding readers of the overall impression you wanted to make about your topic. Some writers take this opportunity to explain how their topic is connected to a larger insight or meaning as well. Conclusions to descriptive essays can answer the following types of questions:

- Which characteristics are most prominent or significant?
- What overall impression or opinion do these characteristics leave you with?
- How do people, places, or objects like your topic affect people overall?

Above all, the conclusion to a descriptive essay makes the topic more memorable and gives the reader closure.

Think About It

- What are the most noticeable characteristics of your topic?
- What do you see when you look at your topic far away and up close?
- What overall impression do you want your readers to have by the end of your essay?

Use these questions to brainstorm ideas before starting your first draft. As you work on your descriptive essay, remember that your goal is to help readers imagine your topic as vividly as possible.

Writing a Definition Essay

Chapter 1: Section 2, Lesson 4

How well can a dictionary really help you understand what a word means? After all, words mean something slightly different to each person. A definition essay is a piece of writing that explains the deeper meaning of an abstract word or concept. Words like *success, friendship,* or *environmentalist* are difficult to define because everyone defines them a bit differently. Your definition essay will help you explain your personal interpretation of a word as opposed to the standard dictionary definition.

Essay Structure

A definition essay is usually framed by an introduction and conclusion, and each body paragraph usually focuses on one part of the definition. Sometimes, each body paragraph topic is a defining characteristic. For example, a definition of *success* can be organized into the following paragraph topics:

   I.   Introduction paragraph
   II.   First defining characteristic: an enjoyable career
   III. Second defining characteristic: a positive outlook
   IV.   Third defining characteristic: family and loved ones
   V.   Conclusion paragraph

In this type of essay, your goal is to explain how each of these factors defines *success*. Because each assignment can vary, it's best to check with the assignment instructions to determine what type of body paragraph topics are most appropriate.

Introduction Paragraph

Use your introduction to create a clear context for your definition. To do that, you might want to include these aspects:

- Explain why the concept or word is important in general.
- Explain why the word means something slightly different to everyone.
- Explain how the word is most commonly defined.

Your goal is to share your more personal or nuanced definition, so use your introduction to show readers why they should reconsider what your targeted word really means.

Thesis Statement

In most definition essays, the introduction also includes a thesis statement that indicates how the word will be defined in the body paragraphs. In setting up the thesis, you might want to list characteristics so that readers know what topics to expect. For example, the following thesis statements show how the body paragraphs will develop the definitions of *success* and *health*:

- *The factors that best define a person's success include an enjoyable career, a positive attitude, and relationships with loved ones.*
- *Although many people define "health" as physical wellness, a healthy person is also someone who has a positive self-image, good relationships with other people, and opportunities for rest and relaxation.*

Definition assignments that require a different approach will provide different types of main ideas or body paragraph topics. The assignment instructions, the instructor, the course textbook, or a tutor can help you determine what type of thesis fits the goals of the assignment.

Topic Sentences

Each of your body paragraphs will include a topic sentence that indicates which part of the definition

you'll describe. Consider these examples:

- Body Paragraph 1: *Success should be defined by whether people enjoy their careers rather than the amount of money or power a career offers.*
- Body Paragraph 2: *Success should also be defined by whether a person has a positive attitude about life.*
- Body Paragraph 3: *Finally, relationships with friends and family often define success because they determine whether a person can be truly happy.*

Each of these sentences would begin a different body paragraph so that readers can easily figure out how the essay is organized.

Supporting Details
Your body paragraphs should support your topic sentences by proving that each part of the definition is accurate or plausible. You can achieve this by describing hypothetical or real situations that illustrate each defining feature. For example, a paragraph about enjoyable careers might include one or all of the following details:

- A description of a person who enjoys his work for reasons besides money
- Examples of jobs that people tend to enjoy
- Descriptions of tasks or responsibilities that make a job rewarding

In addition to details and examples, you'll explain why certain characteristics are essential to the definition.

Conclusion Paragraph
Most definition essays end with a conclusion paragraph that shows how all of the pieces fit together into one bigger definition. The conclusion paragraph for a definition essay often achieves three goals:

- Reminds readers of why the word deserves closer examination
- Reviews the main pieces of the definition
- Explains how people can benefit from reconsidering the definition

By the end of the conclusion paragraph, readers should have a clear understanding of how and why you have defined a term in a certain way.

Think About It

- When have you felt that a dictionary definition was not enough to fully define a word?
- Why should your readers consider alternative definitions for certain words?
- For the word you want to define, how is your definition different from the dictionary's?
-

Considering these questions will help you brainstorm ideas for your topic and develop the key points you'll make in the body of your essay. Writing definition essays are rewarding because they challenge you to examine beliefs and assumptions more closely.

Writing a Cause and Effect Essay

Chapter 1: Section 2, Lesson 5

Understanding causes and effects is essential in nearly all aspects of life. People analyze causes and effects without even realizing it as they make important decisions or solve everyday problems like "Why am I grumpy on Thursdays?" Writing cause and effect essays helps you develop good decision-making skills to use in many circumstances life brings your way.

Cause and effect essays describe the underlying causes and/or the major effects of a situation or event. You may run across these essays in writing courses, but they're popular in history and science courses as well. A cause and effect essay usually follows one of three possible approaches:

Causes: Describe the factors that cause a certain situation, event, or problem to happen
Effects: Describe the effects that are caused by a certain situation, event, or problem
Both: Describe the causes and effects of a situation

The purpose of these essays varies with each assignment. In some cases, the purpose is only to inform or to demonstrate knowledge about a chain of events or an underlying process. You'd meet this purpose if you needed to describe the causes of the Great Depression. In other cases, the purpose is to persuade an audience to avoid certain causes that lead to negative effects, such as "effects of smoking." Some topics can be approached with various purposes; for example, "effects of social media" can be neutral or persuasive depending on the instructor's requirements.

Essay Structure
Each body paragraph in a cause and effect essay usually focuses on a cause, an effect, or a link in the cause and effect chain. Noting or listing the causes or effects before writing a first draft can make the drafting process simpler. For example, one way to prepare for an assignment on the effects of social media or the causes of low voter turnout is to complete an outline like one of these.

Effects of Social Media	**Causes of Low Voter Turnout**
I. Introduction paragraph II. First effect of social media: _____ III. Second effect: _____ IV. Third effect: _____ V. Fourth effect: _____ VI. Conclusion paragraph	I. Introduction paragraph II. First cause of low turnout: _____ III. Second cause: _____ IV. Third cause: _____ V. Fourth cause: _____ VI. Conclusion paragraph

Before making an outline, verify whether the body paragraphs should focus on causes, effects, or both, and check the required length to help you decide how many body paragraphs are necessary. There is no magic rule insisting that every cause and effect essay should discuss three or four causes or effects, so you'll need to use your own discretion. You may want to share an outline with a tutor or instructor for feedback about the overall plan before writing the first draft.

Introduction Paragraph
Most cause and effect essays begin with an introduction paragraph that establishes a clear topic and a clear purpose for exploring the causes and/or effects. The introduction should convince readers that the underlying causes or major effects are worth reading about. It also usually gives enough background information about the topic to prepare readers for the thesis. The following questions can help you decide what information readers need to find in your introduction:

- Why is this topic significant?
- Who or what does it usually involve?

- Where, when, or how often does the situation occur?

Each type of topic requires slightly different background information.

Thesis Statement
In most cause and effect essays, the introduction includes a thesis statement that helps readers understand the main idea of the essay and whether the essay will discuss causes, effects, or both. For some essays, you may need to explain to readers why they should be concerned about causes or effects, while for other essays, you may need to convince readers that there is a cause and effect connection between events. Consider these examples:

- Informative cause and effect thesis: *The Great Depression was caused by several factors, including a stock market crash, bank failures, and a drought.*
- Persuasive cause and effect thesis: *Teens should avoid using alcohol because it can lead to several harmful effects.*

The first example focuses on three causes of the Great Depression, and the second example focuses on effects. The assignment instructions will usually give clues about what type of thesis is appropriate.

Topic Sentences
Each body paragraph in a cause and effect essay usually begins with a topic sentence that indicates which cause or effect the paragraph will describe. Topic sentences usually include some form of the words "cause" or "effect" as well. For example, the first topic sentence in a paper about the Great Depression might begin as follows:

One of the main factors that caused the Great Depression was the stock market crash of 1929.

The word choices make it obvious that the paragraph will focus on a particular event that caused the Great Depression.

Supporting Details
After each topic sentence, a cause and effect body paragraph should link the cause and its effect. You can do this by providing two types of information:

- Evidence that proves the cause or effect happened or will happen
- Explanations about why the cause or effect has a causal relationship to the main topic

Readers need to see facts and details to convince them that certain causes or effects are plausible. For example, if you wanted to show that social media hurt academic performance, you would need to include statistics or examples that prove teens actually get worse grades or test scores when they use social media too often. You would also need to explain exactly how and why social media affects academic performance, perhaps by citing outside sources as evidence of each cause or effect or by using your own experiences and personal knowledge for support. No matter what kind of details you use, your supporting sentences will show cause and effect with words such as *because, as a result, due to, therefore, consequently, stems from, causes, affects, leads to, results in,* and *effects*.

Conclusion Paragraph
Most cause and effect papers end with a conclusion paragraph that achieves three goals:

- Summarizes the most significant causes or effects from the body paragraphs
- Reminds readers of why the topic is worth understanding
- Explains the outcomes that can be achieved or avoided by understanding the causes or effects

As with most papers, the conclusion should avoid introducing new causes or effects.

Think About It

- Of all the possible causes and/or effects of your topic, which ones will be the most useful, interesting, or surprising for your readers?
- How do you know that these causes or effects are accurate?
- How will your readers benefit from knowing about these causes or effects?

Answering these questions will help you brainstorm ideas for body paragraph topics and supporting details as well as your introduction and conclusion as you write a cause and effect essay.

Writing a Process Essay

Chapter 1: Section 2, Lesson 6

Think about a time when you had to read instructions about how to do something. Perhaps you needed to learn how to play a new game or how to make a new dish. What if you had a chance to teach someone else how to do something that was important to you? In a process or "how to" essay, you get the chance to describe the sequence of steps that make up a process. Some process essays describe how a natural process happens, such as the steps of photosynthesis. The most common type of process essay, however, teaches readers how to accomplish something by following a sequence of steps, such as how to make a blueberry cheesecake or how to change the oil in a car.

Essay Structure
Process essays are usually framed by an introduction and conclusion, and each body paragraph usually focuses on one step in the process, presented in a chronological order. For example, an essay about how to make blueberry cheesecake can be organized as follows:

I.   Introduction paragraph
II.   First step: preparing the blueberry sauce
III. Second step: making the crust
IV.   Third step: preparing the cake batter
V.   Fourth step: baking the cake
VI.   Conclusion paragraph

Each Roman numeral represents one paragraph topic, and the number of body paragraphs and steps that you use will vary with the topic and the required length. You'll want to be sure to provide your steps in chronological order so that readers follow the correct sequence. You might even want to outline the paragraph topics to ensure that no major steps are left out.

Introduction Paragraph

The introduction paragraph in a process essay usually establishes a clear purpose for learning the process. You can convince readers that the process is worth the time and effort by answering questions such as:

- When would this process be useful?
- What is the main benefit of learning the process?
- In what ways is this process important to people?

An introduction to a process paper about making blueberry cheesecake might explain how popular the dessert can be, how expensive it costs at a store or restaurant, and why it's better to make the dessert at home.

Thesis Statement

In most process essays, the introduction ends with a thesis statement that names the overall process and gives an idea of the steps involved. You could choose to list all of the steps in the thesis, but you don't always have to. The following thesis statements show that the body paragraphs will describe four steps, but the second thesis lists what those four steps will be. When in doubt about whether or not to list all of your steps, check with your teacher or re-read your assignment instructions.

- *Making a homemade blueberry cheesecake is a fun and easy process that involves four main steps.*
- *Making a homemade blueberry cheesecake is a fun and easy process that involves gathering ingredients, preparing the batter, making a crust, and baking in a special way.*

These theses help readers immediately understand that the body paragraphs will describe a process. To create a similar thesis, you can answer questions like "What main process will my essay cover?" and "What steps will the process involve?"

Topic Sentences

Each body paragraph in a process essay usually begins with a topic sentence that names the main step the paragraph will describe. You might want to include transitional words such as *first*, *then*, or *next*, or transitional phrases as you start each body paragraph, to guide your readers through the steps of the process. For example, you might have topic sentences like:

- *The first step for making this cheesecake is to prepare the blueberry sauce.*
- *After the sauce is finished, the next step is to prepare a graham-cracker crust.*

The transition words *first, after,* and *next* help readers to remember and follow the steps in order.

Supporting Details

After each topic sentence, you'll include supporting details that describe how to complete each step. These details will have a lot of concrete descriptions and sensory details to help readers imagine or visualize the process. For example, writers often need to describe the shapes, colors, textures, and sizes of ingredients and supplies so that readers understand what to look for. You should also rely on using precise word choices and details. For example, a phrase like *½ cup of Dr. Pepper* is more precise than *a splash of soda*. To make the sequence more obvious, add transition words within each body paragraph. The following common transitions signal a time sequence:

before	previously	during	simultaneously
then	afterwards	later	at the same time
finally	next	last	subsequently

After drafting the body paragraphs, you may have to go back and add more specific information so that no important details are left out. One of the challenges of this type of writing is that when a process is very familiar, writers often follow it in real life without thinking about the steps. Justifying those steps, or explaining why it's necessary to follow each one in the specific order listed, will ensure that readers complete the process correctly if they decide to try it on their own.

Conclusion Paragraph
Your conclusion paragraph will summarize the major steps and reiterate the main result that readers can look forward to. You could also include a few sentences about the end result so that readers are even more motivated to try the process for themselves. For example, an essay about making blueberry cheesecake would describe the possibilities of serving the dish to friends and loved ones or of having a whole cheesecake to enjoy at home (versus the single $12 slice one might find at a restaurant). It could also describe the sense of satisfaction a reader might feel after learning the process.

Think About It

- What process can you do well that you might like to write about in an essay?
- What are the most essential steps for achieving that process?
- In what order should your reader follow the steps?
- What special techniques or tools do you use to complete each step?

Consider these questions as you prepare to write a process essay. Your readers will appreciate learning how to do something new!

Writing a Classification Essay

Chapter 1: Section 2, Lesson 7

Whether or not you realize it, you create classifications every day. You use categories to decide what kind of store to visit, which type of restaurants to frequent, and even what sort of friends to have. Classification essays require that kind of decision-making ability, too. Your classification essay will help you and your readers decide how to divide a larger topic into several unique and independent smaller topics.

Essay Structure
Classification essays are usually organized into an introduction, a few body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Each of your body paragraphs focuses on a different subdivision within the main group. For example, a classification essay about types of parenting styles might subdivide parents according to how firmly they discipline. That essay might include the following subtopics:

   I.   Introduction paragraph
  II.   First type: *uninvolved*
 III.   Second type: *permissive*
  IV.   Third type: *oppressive*
   V.   Fourth type: *authoritative*
  VI.   Conclusion paragraph

Each Roman numeral represents one paragraph topic. The number of body paragraphs varies according to the assigned length and the number of subtopics required to include all members of the original topic.

Keep in mind that the categories should all reflect the same level and the same principle of division. For example, an essay about types of parenting could list *uninvolved, permissive, oppressive, and authoritarian,* using the filter of "discipline style" to sort parenting types. However, it could NOT list *uninvolved, "helicopter," and single-parent.* The incorrect grouping shows too much possibility for overlap because the kinds of parents are not grouped by the same filter. *"Helicopter"* parents might also be single parents, for example. Also, other groups are completely left out of this classification. How would you include parents who are very involved? Or those who are married or co-parenting? Instead, a strong classification paper will subdivide a larger group into smaller, definably different subgroups. You'll organize those smaller groups in a purposeful order, such as "least to most important" or "least desirable to most desirable" or "most common to least common."

Introduction Paragraph
The introduction paragraph in a classification essay usually establishes a clear purpose for breaking your topic into categories (your "filter"), and it provides background information for those readers who aren't yet familiar with the topic. Some questions answered in a classification introduction might include

   • Why is the topic significant or important?
   • When and why are people sometimes confused about the categories?
   • When and why do people need to know about the categories?

Thesis Statement
In most classification essays, the introduction also includes a thesis statement that helps readers identify the classification "filter" you're applying. For example, a thesis about types of parents can take either of the following forms:

   • *Based on their disciplining styles, parents generally use one of four basic approaches, including uninvolved, permissive, oppressive, or authoritarian.*
   • *After observing common trends in discipline, parenting experts often classify parenting styles into four main categories: uninvolved, permissive, oppressive, and authoritarian.*

Both thesis statements help readers understand that the essay will subdivide parenting styles according to the way parents cover discipline.

Topic Sentences
Each body paragraph in a classification essay usually begins with a topic sentence that focuses on one main subtopic. In the example on parenting, the first body paragraph could begin

Some of the parents who exercise the worst discipline fall into the category of "uninvolved parents."

This sentence also states the paragraph's topic, and it gives a value judgment (by saying the worst) about the category, which is useful and appropriate for some but not all classification topics.

Supporting Details
After each topic sentence, add details about the characteristics of each subcategory, and then add in a few examples that fit the category. Your body paragraph will use strategies used in definition and description essays because you'll need to define and explain what makes each category unique, and you'll need to add examples to support your definition. The body paragraphs also include an element of comparison/contrast writing since you'll need to clarify how each subcategory is unlike the others enough to be distinct, but similar enough to belong to the overall group. (To see more on these different essay types, refer to Writing a Definition Essay, Writing a Descriptive Essay, and Writing a Compare and Contrast Essay). For a process essay, a paragraph about authoritarian parents would include the following types of details:

- A definition of what *authoritarian* means in the context of parenting
- A description of the main characteristics of authoritarian parents
- A description of an authoritarian parent from real life or a book or film
- An explanation of what makes an authoritarian parent different from an authoritative one

The types of examples writers use to illustrate each category depend largely on two factors:

- Guidelines for using first person (*I*, *me*, *we*)
- Requirements for using outside research

If you're using first-person writing, then you probably need to rely on first-hand experiences. If you can't use the first-person pronouns, then you may want to use evidence from experts.

Conclusion Paragraph
The conclusion paragraph in a classification essay helps your readers understand the categories you described and the larger goal or point behind your classification exercise. You can brainstorm your conclusion by answering the following questions:

- Why should readers accept your subtopics? Is your principle of classification valid?
- How effectively have you subdivided your larger topic?
- How clearly are your body paragraphs divided? That is, can readers appreciate why you've subdivided the topics as you have?
- What new understanding or insight should readers have after your discussion of the categories?

Whereas the body paragraphs look at the individual parts or pieces of the topic, the conclusion puts them back together again so readers can see the bigger picture.

Think About It

- When have you used categories to make important decisions in your daily life?
- What categories did you use, and why are these categories helpful for other people?
- Which characteristics or physical descriptions and details will help your readers recognize

each of the categories?

These questions will help you begin to explore your topic and your overall purpose as well as some details for a first draft.

Writing a Compare and Contrast Essay

Chapter 1: Section 2, Lesson 8

How am I similar to the other people in my family? Why should I buy a house in one neighborhood but not another? These are just a couple of examples of how comparing and contrasting comes up in everyday life. You can showcase those skills in a compare and contrast essay.

The compare and contrast essay is a common assignment in college writing courses as well as discipline-specific courses, such as history, literature, or science. It involves describing how two or more topics are similar and/or different. The main purpose of this kind of assignment can vary; sometimes, your goal is simply to show that you understand how two topics are similar and/or different. Other times, the goal is to prove an argument about which of two options is "better" for one reason or another.

Essay Structure

Compare and contrast essays are usually organized into an introduction, two or more body paragraphs, and a conclusion. The first step is to decide which similarities and/or differences you want to discuss. You might want to start by brainstorming several similarities and differences and then narrowing the list to three or four that will make the essay informative or convincing. Some instructors require students to discuss a combination of similarities and differences, but you can often discuss only similarities or only differences. For example, if your purpose is to contrast two concert venues to determine which offers a better show, you might choose to describe the differences in the stage, seating, and sound, without mentioning the similarities in parking or location.

The body of the essay is usually organized in one of two ways: 1) block structure or 2) point-by-point. In a blocked compare and contrast, the writer will provide all of the details about Topic A and then all of the details about Topic B. In a point-by-point essay, each body paragraph focuses on a similarity or difference. Here is an example of how each format works for an essay about two concert venues in Kansas City: Crossroads and Starlight Amphitheater.

Block	Point-by-Point

I. Introduction paragraph
II. Crossroads
    o Stage
    o Seating
    o Sound
III. Starlight Amphitheater
    o Stage
    o Seating
    o Sound
IV. Conclusion paragraph
	I. Introduction paragraph
	II. Differences between the stages
	    o Stage setup at Crossroads
	    o Stage setup at Starlight
	III. Differences between the seating
	    o Seating options at Crossroads
	    o Seating options at Starlight
	IV. Differences between the sound
	    o Sound quality at Crossroads
	    o Sound quality at Starlight
	V. Conclusion paragraph

Each Roman numeral represents one paragraph. As you can see, the paragraphs in both formats follow a consistent pattern of development so that readers can understand the ideas more easily. Often, it's hard to know which format is better for your topic, but the instructor, assignment instructions, and course textbook can help you decide.

Introduction Paragraph

The introduction paragraph in a compare and contrast essay establishes your reason for examining the two topics together; that is, it helps readers understand why you've chosen to evaluate the two topics you have. Consider the following:

- *Summer is a great time to enjoy live music outdoors, and two of the most popular outdoor venues in Kansas City are Crossroads and Starlight Amphitheater. Music lovers often have*

trouble choosing which concerts to attend, but learning about the venues can make that decision easier.

- *Reality television shows about wilderness and survival have become increasingly popular. In these shows, participants are usually deposited into a remote area, where they must use their skills and intellect to find food and shelter. Two of the most recent survival reality shows include* Man vs Wild *and* Survivorman.

These are only partial introductions, but they show how each writer begins to establish a clear context and purpose for looking at two topics in the same category.

In addition to context, your introduction will provide background details on the two topics. For example, readers might need the answer to a few questions about the reality shows:

- Who are the contestants?
- What is the object of each competition?
- Where and when can viewers see the shows?

Your introduction will likely conclude with a thesis statement that names the characteristics you want to contrast or compare.

Thesis Statement
In a compare and contrast paper, the thesis statement tells readers whether the body paragraphs will discuss similarities or differences. As with most papers, the thesis usually includes a main idea and information about the body paragraph topics. For some compare and contrast assignments, you might need to tell readers why the comparison is necessary or worthwhile. For other assignments, you might need to argue that one of the two topics is better than the other. The requirements for listing body paragraph topics vary as well; some instructors will expect you to list the similarities and/or differences that the body paragraphs will describe. Consider these few variations for the concert venue thesis statement:

- *To make an informed choice about summer concerts in Kansas City, one should consider several key differences between Crossroads and Starlight.* **[contrast-only thesis]**
- *Crossroads and Starlight both offer music lovers a chance to catch local bands performing in an acoustically rich, yet affordable, open-air venue.* **[comparison-only thesis]**
- *Although both Starlight and Crossroads have wonderful accommodations and customer service, Starlight is a better venue for live outdoor music because it offers a better stage, seating chart, and sound system than Crossroads.* **[comparison and contrast thesis]**

Check your assignment instructions: they'll usually have clues about what type of thesis is most appropriate.

Topic Sentences
Your topic sentences will help readers understand the point of each body paragraph and the way each paragraph fits into the essay as a whole. In a point-by-point essay, your topic sentence will name the similarity or difference the upcoming paragraph will discuss. Each of these sentences could begin a different paragraph in the concert venue essay.

Body Paragraph 1: *One very obvious difference between Crossroads and Starlight is the location of the stages.*
Body Paragraph 2: *Concertgoers in Kansas City will notice that the seating charts are much different at Crossroads and Starlight.*
Body Paragraph 3: *The sound quality at the two venues is also very different.*

These topic sentences indicate which difference each body paragraph will focus on.

Supporting Details

Your supporting details should describe how each characteristic applies to the two topics. You'll need to be specific enough to convince readers that the similarities or differences are both accurate and significant, which means you'll probably need a few sentences about each similarity or difference within the two topics. For example, a paragraph about the seating charts would include a few sentences about seating options at Crossroads and a few more sentences about the seats at Starlight. You might even want to explain why those characteristics and details are worth considering. For example, a paragraph about seating would answer questions like *What are the benefits or drawbacks of certain seating arrangements?* or *How do certain types of seats factor into a person's decision about buying tickets?*

Conclusion Paragraph
The conclusion paragraph for a compare and contrast essay often achieves three goals:

- Reviews the two topics together
- Summarizes the similarities and/or differences that are most significant
- Reminds readers of what can be learned or gained by examining the two topics

When a compare and contrast essay ends with this information, readers are more likely to remember and use the information in the future.

Think About It

- Why do you want to explore how these topics are similar and/or different?
- Which similarities and/or differences are most useful to consider?
- Which details show readers what each similarity and/or difference looks like in real life?

Answering these questions will help you brainstorm ideas for your thesis and body paragraphs. Writing a compare and contrast paper can be challenging but also very enjoyable and relevant to everyday life.

Writing an Argument Essay

Chapter 1: Section 2, Lesson 9

Argument is a skill people use daily without even realizing it. For example, suppose you wanted to convince a store manager to let you use a coupon that had expired. When making your case with the manager, you could explain that she should accept the coupon because you're a loyal customer, because it's a good financial decision for the store, and because it will lead you to visit the store again. All of these points are the reasons behind your opinion.

The argument essay is the most common college writing assignment. At some point in your college career, you'll be asked to defend your opinion in a piece of writing, relying on a variety of logical reasons. The discussion below covers the parts of a classical argument essay and the strategies that will convince readers to support your views. For information on other types of arguments, such as Rogerian or Toulmin, please see Tools for Arguing.

Essay Structure
An argument essay usually includes a separate section or body paragraph for each of your reasons, or *lines of argument*. You'll probably start your argument essay by choosing 1) the main argument and 2) a few specific reasons why the argument is justified or valid.

In some types of arguments, you'll need to persuade readers to take a specific action. In that case, your opinion might be about what that group of people should do—such passing or overturning a law. In other assignments, you might need to argue whether or not something is effective or fair. The assignment instructions will usually give clues about what type of main argument is most appropriate.

No matter what kind of argument you're writing, your reasons or arguments should detail *why readers should support your position.* Don't get the argument style confused by writing *reasons why something happens* as you might in a process analysis essay.

In addition to reasons, some arguments require counterarguments, which are body paragraphs that present the opposing viewpoints. If you're unsure about whether your assignment requires counterarguments, the best person to ask is the instructor.

Planning your paragraph topics before writing a first draft can make the drafting process easier. Below are two examples of outlines for argument papers.

Main argument: *Downtown Atlanta needs more bike lanes.*	
Essay without Counterarguments	**Essay with a Counterargument**
I. Introduction paragraph II. First reason: to reduce cycling accidents III. Second reason: to reduce car pollution IV. Third reason: to reduce car traffic V. Conclusion paragraph	I. Introduction paragraph II. First reason: to reduce cycling accidents III. Second reason: to reduce car pollution IV. Third reason: to reduce car traffic V. Counterargument: the cost would be high VI. Conclusion paragraph

In each outline, there are three lines of argument. Depending on your assignment requirements, however, you could develop more than three reasons, as long as they're all developed separately and logically. Some instructors also require a paragraph of additional background information after the introduction. Consider planning your paragraph topics before writing a first draft and asking a tutor or your instructor for feedback about your plan.

Introduction Paragraph

Most argument essays begin with an introduction paragraph that provides an overview of the topic and the debate and that convinces readers that the debate is significant enough to consider. The introduction also includes a thesis statement, which is described in the next section. One way to prepare readers for your topic is by answering these types of questions:

- What specific problem are you focusing on? What statistics or other evidence proves that the problem or dilemma is real?
- Who does this problem or debate affect?
- Why is this issue significant or worth considering?
- What are the two main positions about this issue?

Each type of topic requires slightly different background information. A good rule of thumb is to assume that your reader knows little about the topic, so you're more likely to provide sufficient information.

Thesis Statement
In most argument essays, the introduction also includes a thesis statement that helps readers understand the main argument you'll defend. Some thesis statements also include a list of the reasons, but a list thesis isn't always required. Ask your instructor or check the assignment instructions if you're not sure how to set up your thesis. For some writers and readers, a list thesis can be very useful way to prepare for the body paragraphs. A third option for the thesis is to include the main counterarguments your paper will develop, but this may be less feasible if your paper will discuss two or more counterarguments. For the topic about bike lanes, three different thesis statements could work:

- **Thesis with a main argument only:** *The city of Atlanta should install more bike lanes on busy downtown streets in order to solve several traffic-related problems.*
- **Thesis with a main argument and reasons:** *The city of Atlanta should install more bike lanes on busy downtown streets to reduce cycling accidents, pollution, and car traffic.*
- **Thesis with a main argument, reasons, and counterargument:** *Even though the financial costs may be high, the city of Atlanta should install more bike lanes on busy downtown streets to reduce cycling accidents, pollution, and car traffic.*

Lines of Argument
The reasons or *lines of argument* make up the foundation of an effective argument. Unless your assignment says otherwise, most of the body paragraphs should focus on reasons why your position is valid. Each reason usually needs to be developed in a separate section or body paragraph. (For an essay that is five pages or less, you can probably develop each reason in a single paragraph.) One way to develop these types of body paragraphs is by following a three-step process:

- Begin with a topic sentence that states the focus of your paragraph. These topic sentences often include words like *one reason, another reason,* and *because*. For example, the first line of argument about bike lanes could begin with the topic sentence: *One of the most urgent reasons why Atlanta needs more bike lanes is to reduce the bicycle-related accidents that happen when cyclists and motorists must share the same lanes.*
- Provide several pieces of logical evidence to prove the reason is accurate. Each assignment requires different types of evidence. Some instructors will require the evidence to come from your personal experience while others will ask for evidence from outside sources, such as statistics, expert opinions, recent news events, or research studies. Each time you mention a fact from another source, you'll need to at least give the author's name, but you may need to cite other details as well. For more information about citing evidence, consult [MLA Style](#), [APA Style](#) and [Chicago/Turabian Style](#).
- Explain why the evidence proves your main argument. A typical line of argument usually includes some analysis about why certain facts or details prove the main argument is true.

Counterarguments or Refutations
Some argument assignments require a paragraph or more of counterarguments. The purpose is to show readers that you understand the opposing viewpoints, but that your own position is stronger.

Counterarguments show readers that you are well-informed about your topic, but they are not always required. When counterarguments are part of the assignment, the requirements can take many different forms. A few possibilities include

- Briefly describing and refuting a few counterarguments in one body paragraph
- Describing and refuting one major counterargument in a single body paragraph
- Including complete body paragraphs for a couple of different counterarguments

Although the length and level of detail for each counterargument can vary, they're typically developed in three steps:

- Introduce the counterargument in a transition sentence or topic sentence. For example, a counterargument for the bike lanes paper may begin like this: *Some local politicians have argued that the bike lanes will not be feasible because of the construction costs.*
- Describe who has made this claim and why. Which person or group of people has made this claim? Which beliefs or evidence does the counterargument include?
- Explain why the counterargument is flawed. For example, in a paper about bike lanes, the paragraph with counterarguments would explain why the bike lanes are worth the cost and/or why the costs would not be as high as some believe.

Conclusion Paragraph
Most argument essays end with a conclusion paragraph that summarizes the key points and leaves the reader with some hope or some sense of urgency to support the topic. An argument's conclusion may include the following parts:

- A reminder of the main argument or main opinion
- A summary of the most significant reasons why the opinion is worth considering
- Insight about how the main argument serves the greater good

As with most papers, the conclusion should avoid introducing new reasons or new evidence but should instead bring closure to what was already discussed.

Think About It

- What are some issues in your community or in national headlines that you care about?
- What is your position on one of these issues?
- For what reasons do you have this opinion?
- What evidence will prove that these reasons are worth considering?

Answering these questions will help you to brainstorm ideas about how to choose an effective topic, a main argument, and specific reasons.

Tools for Arguing

Chapter 1: Section 2, Lesson 10

An argumentative essay takes a stance on an issue, making its stance clear from the beginning and then working to support that stance as decisively as possible. Alternatively, it can consider two sides or perspectives of an issue and come to a conclusion based on that analysis.

There are a couple of ways you can present your stance in argumentative writing. In an essay, you might present a formal thesis, while your stance might be more implicit in a newspaper editorial. Whatever approach you use, you'll have an audience that you need to convince. You can do that in a few different ways.

Classical

In a classical argument, your goal is to convince your reader to agree with you, or at least to agree that your position is worth considering. While not all readers will agree with your position, a strong, thoughtful, and considerate argument will at least get readers to seriously think about what you have to say. A classical argument makes its stance clear, and it often relies on logic and clear reasons to support that stance. However, it can also use other types of support, such as primary and secondary research.

A thesis for a classical argument might simply make a claim and leave the essay body to identify the supporting reasons: *The curfew in the Oak Ravines parks system has become ineffective.* Another thesis might state its rationale clearly: *Capital punishment is wrong because it is expensive, it isn't always accurate, and it doesn't act as a deterrent.*

Persuasive

A persuasive argument should motivate readers to take action. For example, do you want a law to be instated or revoked? Do you want a policy to be created, adjusted, or abolished? Through a persuasive paper, you will try to get readers to take action based on the argument; the thesis often makes the action called for as clear as possible. For example, *New York City should ban red-light cameras because they invade privacy, they cause accidents, and most importantly, they don't catch the worst driving offenders.*

Toulmin

Developed by Stephen Toulmin, the Toulmin Model of argument begins with a claim and then seeks to justify that claim. Under the Toulmin Model, a justified argument can involve up to six interrelated components: *claim, qualifiers, grounds, warrant, backing* and *rebuttal.* Of these, Toulmin regarded only three—*claim, grounds, and warrant*—as essential for any justified argument, with the three other components not always being necessary.

A Toulmin thesis makes a basic claim about an issue. For example, you might argue, *The cosmetics industry's continued use of microbeads is dangerous and unacceptable.* You would then go on to support that claim using the components above. For a further discussion of Toulmin, see his book *The Uses of Argument* (1958). Further discussions of and guides to implementing the Toulmin Model are readily available online.

Rogerian

While a classical argument addresses the opposition, a Rogerian argument does much more to consider the opposing side. In your Rogerian argument, you need to consider two opposing perspectives and find common ground between them. This kind of argument does make an assertion or claim, but it does so after carefully reflecting on and considering both points of view. You might even decide to compromise, perhaps synthesizing the two perspectives into a new idea.

A Rogerian thesis, which is often found toward the end of the essay, might conclude that *It is true that urban chicken coops could lead to the threat of rats and other pests, as well as excessive noise; homeowners and the community must work together to address these barriers as the city moves forward with permitting urban chicken coops.* This model is named after Carl Rogers because it was

based on his approach to psychology. It was adapted for use in argument by Richard Young, Alton L. Becker, and Kenneth Pike in their book *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change* (1970). Further discussions of and guides to implementing the Rogerian Model are also readily available online.

Counterarguments

The more controversial an issue, the more likely it is that there are at least two opposing, well-established perspectives on the issue. If your topic is particularly high-profile, well-known, or infamous, it often won't do any good to pretend that the opposition doesn't exist. Your readers will probably be familiar with the opposing view, even if you don't directly mention it. You can strengthen your argument by acknowledging and refuting the opposition, sometimes called the *counterargument.*

You can address the counterargument in its own paragraph near the end of your essay, or you can integrate it into each of your body paragraphs, layering it in with your supporting reasons. To address the counterarguments, you need to mention them, but then convince readers that your own argument is better or stronger. For example, if you were arguing against red-light cameras, your counterargument paragraph might begin as follows: *Supporters of red-light cameras point out that the cameras have increased revenue. However, why should the city raise revenue from these legally questionable cameras? If the city needs revenue, most will agree that it should come from property taxes and other clearly legal sources. These cameras are a lawsuit waiting to happen, potentially erasing any revenues that the city receives from them.*

Fallacies

It's important to identify and avoid fallacies, both formal and informal, in your argumentative writing. A *formal fallacy* suggests a problem with the form of the argument itself. If you include personal anecdotes in an argument that depends on academic research, you've committed a formal fallacy. An *informal fallacy* usually relates to the content of an argument rather than to its form. For example, if an argument against red-light cameras shifts to attacking the personality of the local councillor responsible for their implementation, the argument has committed an informal fallacy.

Think About It

- What issue do you want to write about, and what stance will you take?
- Who are you writing for, and what argumentative approach will you use?
- How will you convince your audience to agree with you or at least to consider your argument?

These questions can help you develop an argumentative essay, which allows you to form a well-developed opinion on an issue or topic that you're interested in.

Writing an Exemplification/Illustration Essay

Chapter 1: Section 2, Lesson 11

Suppose you need to file a complaint about a problem at your job or in your neighborhood. What if you need to tell the police that people are driving too fast on your street? To be convincing, you'll need to be ready to give a few examples. The skill of fleshing out examples is called *exemplification* or *illustration.*

In exemplification/illustration essays, writers use specific, real-life examples to illustrate a main belief or concept. An example is a description of a situation or event that the writer saw or experienced first-hand. Some teachers use the term *exemplification essay*, and other teachers use *illustration essay* or *examples essay*. These three terms have the same meaning, so using only *exemplification* will be easiest. Exemplification essays usually describe a few situations that prove a main idea is true. However, these essays have many variations, so consult your assignment instructions, textbook, or instructor to verify the particular requirements. The elements of the most common types of exemplification assignments are described below.

Essay Structure
Exemplification essays are usually organized into an introduction, a few body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Each body paragraph usually focuses on a different example. For example, a writer who wants to prove that texting interferes with face-to-face conversations could organize an essay into three examples.

   I.   Introduction
   II.   A description of a date that was ruined by too much texting
   III. A description of a party that was ruined by too much texting
   IV.   An example of a family dinner that was ruined by too much texting
   V.   Conclusion

Each Roman numeral represents one paragraph topic. An exemplification essay need not be limited to three examples, though. The number of body paragraphs and examples will vary according to the required length and the instructor's expectations.

Introduction Paragraph
Most exemplification essays begin with an introduction paragraph that describes the general belief or concept that will be proven by examples. To prepare readers for the body paragraphs, your introduction will often answer these types of questions.

   • Which particular issue or problem have you noticed?
   • Why should people be concerned about this issue?
   • Why does this issue or problem happen?
   • How can readers recognize it when they see it?

These are just a few possible options, and each topic will require different background information.

Thesis Statement
In most exemplification essays, the introduction closes with a thesis statement that helps readers understand what main idea you'll be proving and how to prove it. The main idea is usually a belief or an opinion that can be supported by your own experiences and observations. A thesis often includes the word *events*, *examples*, or *experiences*. Consider these examples:

   • *My experiences with a date, a family dinner, and a party have convinced me that text messaging interferes with people's ability to have productive face-to-face conversations.*
   • *Several recent experiences have shown me that children these days waste too much food.*

The first example previews the three body paragraph topics, and the second example generally

indicates that the body paragraphs will discuss experiences without listing exactly which examples will be used. When in doubt about what the thesis should include, it's best to consult your instructor or review the assignment instructions.

Topic Sentences
Use topic sentences to indicate which example each body paragraph will describe. Each topic sentence will summarize the experience or event in a few words and reiterate the main idea from the thesis. For example, the following topic sentences would begin body paragraphs in the essay about food waste.

- *An experience volunteering in the cafeteria at my daughter's school showed me how prevalent food waste has become for children today.*
- *Another experience hosting a pizza party showed me that food waste is often enabled by parents.*
- *Finally, my experiences babysitting nieces and nephews has convinced me that food waste is too common.*

Each topic sentence begins a different body paragraph and tells readers what kind of example the body paragraph will hold.

Supporting Details
After each topic sentence, the supporting details in an exemplification essay tend to describe a real situation or event. Often, you'll need to write about events or scenes that you witnessed or experienced directly. When the assignment asks you to use personal examples, you almost have to use personal pronouns like *I* and *me*. Your details should be vivid enough that readers can imagine what happened clearly. To describe an event, use plenty of adjectives, action verbs, and precise nouns. If the details are vague, readers are less likely to believe that each situation happened or to see how each situation illustrates the main idea. After describing what happened in each body paragraph, you should explain why the event illustrates the main belief or opinion.

Conclusion Paragraph
Most exemplification essays end with a conclusion paragraph that brings all of the examples together and elaborates on the main idea. For example, if your main idea is that children waste too much food, your conclusion would remind readers that this issue is prevalent with children today. You might say, *In closing, food waste is all too common among today's children.* You might also summarize the examples that prove your main idea is accurate. Another way to close an exemplification is by answering these types of questions.

- What issue or problem have you observed?
- What should readers do about the issue or problem?
- What can people gain by recognizing these situations?

These are just a few options. In general, an exemplification essay begins with general information, looks closely at specific situations, and then returns to the general concept or belief.

Think About It

- What main problem or issue do you want your readers to notice?
- When have you seen this problem or issue firsthand?
- Which details will make these examples the most convincing?

You can consider answers to these questions to begin brainstorming ideas about which topic and examples will work best for your assignment.

Writing Literary Analyses and Explications

Chapter 1: Section 2, Lesson 12

Have you ever watched a movie or TV show for a second time and noticed details that weren't obvious the first time? Have you ever been so intrigued by a show or movie that you wanted to watch it multiple times to find out what it *really* means? Writing a literary analysis requires the same type of contemplation but through reading instead of watching. Literary analysis essays can take many different forms, but they all involve looking closely at a piece of literature. The word *analyze* means *to break into parts.* Writing an effective analysis usually involves reading the text several times to find clues about why it has a certain effect on readers. The most basic version of a literary analysis will require that you explain how an author uses one or more literary devices to develop a theme. Another form of literary analysis is an explication, in which you will give a chronological interpretation of a poem or other genre. A few common features of analyzing literary devices and explication are described below, but each assignment may vary.

Essay Structure
When an assignment requires you to focus on literary devices, the overall purpose is to explain how the literary devices make a theme more obvious. The theme is the message or insight the author is trying to express. For example, some argue that the theme of the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* is that social hierarchies are illogical and harmful. The author communicates the theme through the use of literary devices, techniques such as setting, characterization, imagery, symbolism, or irony. Some instructors may expect you to discuss a different literary device in each body paragraph so that the essay as a whole describes multiple writing techniques. Other assignments may require you to explore one literary device more deeply, in which case the essay might focus each body paragraph on a different example of the literary device. The structure for two possible methods of analyzing literary devices in *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee are outlined below.

Analyzing Multiple Literary Devices	Analyzing One Literary Device
I. Introduction paragraph II. How the setting supports Lee's theme III. How characters support Lee's theme IV. How irony supports the theme V. Conclusion paragraph	I. Introduction paragraph II. How the character Scout supports the theme III. How Atticus supports the theme IV. How Bob supports the theme V. How Tom supports the theme VI. Conclusion paragraph

In an explication, the purpose is to interpret what each part of the text means. Explications usually focus on poetry, which means that each stanza or line of the poem will be interpreted in chronological order. Writers tend to write a separate body paragraph for each part of the poem. For example, for a 3-line haiku, each body paragraph might focus on a different line. For a longer poem, each body paragraph might focus on one stanza. Usually, the goal is to explain how each part of the poem supports a larger theme.

Many writers create an outline of paragraph topics before writing a first draft. Choosing the body paragraph topics usually requires a second, close reading of the text.

Introduction Paragraph
A literary analysis usually begins with an introduction that prepares readers for the analysis. One popular strategy is to summarize why the text is important and what the text is about. Just as you needed to understand the basic content and premise of the text before analyzing it, your readers need to know what the text is about before learning about the literary devices. Thus, an introduction to a literary analysis usually answers these types of questions.

The introduction to an explication tends to serve the same purpose as other types of analyses, which is to familiarize readers with your topic. An introduction provides important background information about the author, title, subject, and theme.

Fiction	Poetry
• What main work (title and author) has a special significance to people and why? • What main theme does the text explore? • When and where does the story take place? • What main characters does the text mostly follow? • What type of conflict or situation does the text mostly describe?	• Which poem (title and author) has a special historical, social, or thematic significance and why? • What main theme does the poem explore? • Who is the speaker of the poem? • What main images are described? • What if any action takes place? • Which form or style is mostly used?

Each story, poem, or play will lend itself to different types of background details. The overall goal is to help readers feel mentally prepared for a thesis and body paragraphs.

Thesis Statement
When an assignment asks you to focus on literary devices, the thesis usually gives the main theme of the work and an indication of which literary device(s) enhance(s) the theme. The goal of the thesis is to show which theme is supported by literary devices and which literary device(s) you will discuss in the body paragraphs. Each example corresponds to one of the sample outlines in the *Essay Structure* section below:

- *Lee uses setting, characterization, and irony to demonstrate the illogical and harmful nature of social hierarchies.* (Each body paragraph would focus on a different literary device.)
- *Lee develops her theme about the illogical and harmful nature of social hierarchies through the use of characterization.* (Each body paragraph would focus on a different example of characterization.)

The thesis for an explication usually gives the overall theme of the poem and some indication of how you'll develop that theme. The preview of body paragraphs should help readers understand that the essay will provide a chronological interpretation, but it doesn't need to list the lines or stanzas you'll interpret. Consider this example explication thesis:

The poem "Caged Bird" develops a theme about survival by vividly contrasting a free bird with a caged bird in six detailed stanzas.

This thesis helps readers understand that the paper will explore the poem's theme, and noting the number of stanzas reveals a chronological interpretation.

Topic Sentences
In traditional literary analyses, you should begin each body paragraph with a topic sentence to help readers understand which example or literary device the paragraph will discuss. The topic sentences usually remind readers of the work's main theme as well. For example, an analysis of multiple literary devices in *To Kill a Mockingbird* could include topic sentences like these:

- *One way that Lee develops her theme about social hierarchy is by setting her story in the 1950s rural South.*
- *Lee also shows the problems with social hierarchy through the development of several characters.*
- *Several examples of irony also cause readers to question the logic of social hierarchies.*

Each topic sentence would begin a different body paragraph, and all of the sentences after each topic sentence would focus on the same literary device that it mentions.

In an explication, the first sentence of each body paragraph usually indicates which part of the poem the paragraph will interpret. However, you probably won't need to echo the theme in the topic sentences as with other types of analyses. Instead, each topic sentence focuses its paragraph on a particular part of the text and indicates what the part is about. For example, the first body paragraph in an explication of "Caged Bird" would begin as follows:

In the first stanza, the speaker describes a free bird soaring across a sunny sky.

This topic sentence helps readers to see that the paragraph will interpret the first stanza. Topic sentences make the structure of the paper more apparent so that readers understand the purpose of each supporting detail.

Supporting Details
After each topic sentence, supporting details describe and quote specific places in the text where a literary device is present. To provide this level of detail, you may need to read the text a third or fourth time. If each body paragraph focuses on a different literary device, then the supporting details will show a few different examples of the literary device. You can achieve this by either quoting or paraphrasing the original text. For example, a body paragraph about setting will describe a few passages of the novel where its time or location are mentioned. While re-reading, you might write the topic of each body paragraph on a different sheet of paper and record relevant quotations for each body paragraph. Many assignments will require you to use MLA citations as well, which are described in MLA Style. After each paraphrase or quotation, you should explain how the example is relevant to the theme. In other words, why is each example consistent with the message readers should get from the poem or story?

The supporting details in an explication follow a chronological order to describe what each word or line says and means. For example, if a body paragraph focuses on the first stanza of a poem, you might include a couple of sentences about each line or each sentence. While describing each line or sentence, you could also point out any poetic devices you observe, such as imagery, alliteration, or rhythm. After describing their meaning, you could also explain how the device develops the theme.

Conclusion Paragraph
A conclusion to a traditional literary analysis tends to summarize the main literary device(s) and elaborate on the theme. First, you might remind readers of the main devices or examples that make the theme most apparent. To take the conclusion further, you could also explain why the theme is worth considering and why it makes the text more memorable or significant. Consider the following questions when concluding this type of analysis:

- What theme is most prevalent throughout the text?
- Why does this theme make the piece especially poignant or valuable?
- What can readers gain by exploring this theme?

Much like the conclusion for other types of analyses, the conclusion to an explication tends to elaborate on the larger theme. For example, your conclusion might explain how the poem helps readers see a theme or subject in a new way.

Think About It

- What types of literary devices are used that you would like to write about?
- Which literary devices are most relevant to the writer's theme?
- How should topic sentences adjust to show readers the structure you want to accomplish?

Use these questions to begin planning and organizing your ideas. As you create your analysis, remember to provide plenty of evidence from the story or poem so that readers understand why you've come to your conclusions.

Film and Television Analyses

Chapter 1: Section 2, Lesson 13

Preparing the Analysis (Setting the Stage)
You've been asked to analyze a film or television show: What does that even mean? Some film analyses include a brief summary of the show, but all of them explain to readers how certain aspects of the film are effective or ineffective. At its root, a film analysis is an argument piece, which means you'll be making claims that you support with examples from the film. Even if it's not your favorite flick, you can work through the process effectively by asking some specific questions about the film or

show. Get started with these tips:

- Watch the film several times so you notice more details
- Take notes while watching, pausing whenever you need
- Identify the film's genre
- Decide which elements you'd like to analyze

Just as books and music can be grouped into categories or *genres*, films fall into several genres also. A genre is a subgroup or category. In music, for example, classical is one of many genres, and in literature, historical fiction is one of many genres. Recognizing the genre of the film or television show is often the first step toward analyzing it.

Common Genres
The most common film genres include the following:

- *Action*: High-energy sequences (Anything with Bruce Willis or Jason Statham)
- *Adventure*: Rousing, fast-moving films that chronicle new experiences (*The Hobbit*)
- *Comedy*: Light-hearted funny films (look for Seth Rogen or a younger Jim Carrey)
- *Documentary*: Fact-based films about a life or an event (*Murderball, Hoop Dreams*)
- *Drama*: Realistic circumstances and serious topics (*Life of Pi, Twelve Years a Slave*)
- *Horror*: Scary, edge-of-your-seat films (*Pan's Labyrinth, Zombieland*)
- *Musical*: Song-driven plots (*Les Miserables, Sound of Music*)
- *Romance*: Touching love stories (*Forest Gump, Titanic*)
- *Science Fiction*: Futuristic experiences and characters (*Star Trek, Star Wars*)

Some films will mix genres, of course, but you can identify the genre by paying close attention early in the film. What details of time period and location do you notice? What feelings does the music create? How do the characters relate to one another? Once you better understand the genre, you can analyze some elements of the film or television show. Grab some popcorn and get ready to take notes!

Elements for Analysis
Directing
Some directors are so intimately involved that the resulting film or show reflects their style or "touch." For instance, think of how you can always tell you are watching a Quentin Tarantino movie.

- What is the director's style? How does this director relate to the actors? Does the director serve any other roles in the film (i.e., producer, choreographer, etc.)? In what ways are the director's other films similar to this one?

Storyline or Plot
A film's plot is what most viewers remember.

- What does the background information tell viewers about the characters or storyline? Why do the conflicts make viewers want to continue watching? What creates tension in the film? Why did the screenwriter or filmmaker end the film in the way he or she did?

Camera Angles
Examine the camera angles and shot lengths.

- Are you, the viewer, looking up, looking down, or looking straight at a scene? How does this affect the viewing of the scene? Why would a director want to make a character or place seem bigger or smaller? Does the film use many long, bird's-eye views or close-up shots? What are their purposes? Think of how action films like *The Avengers* often introduce large cities with extreme long shots taken from helicopters. Why would these shots be chosen? On the other hand, why would a director use close-up shots for particular scenes involving two people?

Camera Movement

The way a camera moves plays a role in the film, too; the motion may be sharp, choppy, smooth, and so on. In essence, the camera can become its own "character." In *The Bourne Ultimatum*, for example, hand-held cameras were used for fight and chase scenes to make them more violent and fast-moving.

- Does the camera ever seem shaky? What would this achieve in a particular scene? Are hand-held cameras ever used? What effect does this have? How does the camera "follow" the action?

Lighting
Filmmakers play on human emotions, including a natural fear of the dark and feelings of peace and calm that accompany sunlight. Other shades and tones can indicate specific feelings or elicit responses. Changes in lighting may be used to indicate flashbacks or to reveal a character's emotions. Near the end of *The Return of the King*, for example, the knights that come to the aid of the city of Gondor are accompanied by a rising sun sweeping away the clouds, symbolizing the defeat of the forces of darkness.

- How are light and dark used in the film? When do you notice changes in dominant colors from scene to scene? Pay attention to sunrises, sunsets, and shadows—what could their purposes be?

Acting
Whether you're watching an A-list actor or an unknown, the performance makes the film in most cases.

- In what ways do the actors make their characters seem real? Think about how Johnny Depp makes Captain Jack Sparrow come to life—or how Keanu Reeves' lack of emotion impacts many of his characters. How do the actors use their voices and gestures to create the scene? How does their portrayal of the characters affect the way viewers understand the story? How do the roles differ from their "typical" roles?

Symbols
Like literature, some films include symbols, such as the mockingjay seen so often in the *Hunger Games* films, which stands for the fight for freedom.

- What images appear repeatedly? Why were they chosen? What could they stand for?

Sound Effects
Sound effects play a significant role in almost every film, and even silence has meaning.

- How do these sound effects help viewers better understand what is happening in the story? Which effects are most powerful? How often does the movie use silence and to what effect?

Visual Effects
Visual effects include a broad group of categories, from the green-screen-filled *Captain America* to the detailed period costumes of *Pride and Prejudice* to the CG dragons of *Game of Thrones*. Since films are pre-eminently visual, consider analyzing the power of the visuals, costumes, or settings.

- How much effort was put into realistic costumes? What details stand out? What locations were used for filming? What roles do those locations play? Were computer graphics (CG) used? What made them effective or distracting? What effects are most powerful or leave something to be desired?

Music
Well-written musical scores tell the story as much as the actors and scenery do. Think of the deep bass sounds in *Jaws* or the rousing music that accompanies the action in *Gladiator*. In musicals, songs are central to advancing the plot.

- Is the soundtrack purely instrumental, or does it have a chorus and verses? Why would these choices have been made? How does the music change from scene to scene and from the beginning to the end of the film? What prominent themes do you notice repeated? What music can be associated with particular characters or emotions?

Think About It

- What elements do you feel you could write the most about?
- What examples from the film or television show could you use to support the claims you make?
- How can your notes and examples help flesh out each main point of the analysis?

Now that you've taken plenty of notes about the film or television show, you can organize and clarify your thoughts. Your experience with film and television analysis may leave you watching shows in a whole new way!

Rhetorical Analysis

Chapter 1: Section 2, Lesson 14

A rhetorical analysis looks at the effectiveness or appeal of a piece of persuasive writing based on three strategies:

- the appeal to reason or *logos*
- the appeal to credibility or *ethos*
- the appeal to emotion or *pathos*

Think of convincing articles or editorials you've seen recently. Maybe a columnist tried to get readers to oppose a new development, or perhaps a science writer stirred up a craze for self-driving cars. If so, these writers may have effectively used logos, ethos, and/or pathos in their arguments. That's the kind of analysis you'll use to create a rhetorical analysis.

The Three Key Rhetorical Strategies
Logos, ethos, and *pathos* are classical terms that identify strategies used to make an argument. Politicians, writers, business people, and even children use these three appeals, knowingly or unknowingly, to try to make a case. Whether a politician is trying to convince the public to support a tax increase or a child wants to convince mom or dad to set bedtime an hour later, argumentative appeals are used regularly, by all kinds of people, in all kinds of scenarios.

Logos: An Appeal to Reason
When analyzing logos, think about the clarity and detail of the writing. For example, if you were reading an editorial about pollution in the local parks system and noticed that the writer suddenly shifted topics to discuss the amount of crime in surrounding neighborhoods, as a reader, wouldn't you be confused? If the writer wanted to make an argument about pollution, why did he or she mention crimes nearby? The writer has ineffectively appealed to logos. To understand logos more deeply, consider these questions:

- How rational, careful, and clear is the writing?
- What makes sense (or not)? Is it easy to understand, or are there ambiguous, unclear, or confusing statements and passages?
- What information, research, or details are necessary to make the argument clear and effective? Which ideas in the writing are related to each other?
- Where do ideas, paragraphs, and passages seem to be disjointed and disconnected?
- Which ideas seem well developed and thoughtful in relation to the central argument?
- Where are ideas fragmented, details sparse, and paragraphs seemingly haphazard and slapped together on a whim?

Ethos: An Appeal to Credibility
When analyzing ethos, think about the credibility of the author. For example, say that you find a relevant article on the decline in bat populations. The author mentions her credentials in this area—a PhD in biology and a long history of publishing on threats to bats. You do your own research and verify these credentials: she has the degree she mentions, and her article draws on her wide experience in writing about bat populations. The writer has effectively appealed to ethos: you believe she's credible. To understand ethos more deeply, consider these questions:

- What personal, professional, or educational experience does the author have?
- How does the author mention, integrate, leverage, or even for some reason ignore his or her own personal experience?
- Does the writer have a record, whether good or bad, that might influence his or her credibility?
- What advanced degree or connection to a major university does the author have—if any?
- What is the author's motive in writing this piece? Is there evidence of bias?

Pathos: An Appeal to Emotion
When analyzing pathos, think about how the author tries to appeal to readers on an emotional level.

The strategy can sometimes be controversial. For example, let's say you're reading an essay arguing in favor of the death penalty. The author asks you to consider a loved one of your own—your girlfriend or boyfriend, parent, or child. The author asks: *How would you feel if this person were the victim of a murder? Wouldn't you want the convicted murderer to face the death penalty?* This strategy tries to appeal to your emotion, to get you invested in the topic, and to have you make a personal connection to the topic. The writer has effectively appealed to pathos; you're aware of your emotions, even if you don't agree with the writer's stance or strategy. To understand pathos more deeply, consider these questions:

- Where does the author try to invoke feelings such as sympathy, empathy, patriotism, affection, concern, or anger?
- In what ways does the author address the reader personally?
- How often does the author use the second person point of view or other strategies to speak directly to the reader?
- Why does the author want you, the reader, to care about the topic, and how does the author try to get you to care—or to care more?
- What strategies does the author use to establish that an argument is one that you should personally care about?

Analysis Strategies
In a rhetorical analysis, you'll use the three strategies discussed above to analyze an author's persuasive argument. A few basic guidelines will get you started in writing a strong rhetorical analysis.

Forming a Thesis
Your thesis should make a statement about how persuasive that argument is. Don't just summarize the text or agree/disagree with the author's argument, and avoid simply announcing that the essay is a rhetorical analysis (e.g., *I will examine how this author uses pathos, ethos, and logos to convince his audience*). An effective thesis about Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" might say, *King's letter effectively appeals to logos, ethos, and pathos using clear and careful wording, his own experiences, and patriotism.*

Using Evidence
Your essay should provide relevant, convincing evidence from the analyzed text. Use quotations, paraphrases, and/or summaries to support your argument about the rhetorical effectiveness of the text. Offer enough commentary on each piece of evidence, clearly explaining why the evidence from the analyzed text is or is not persuasive given the relevant appeal(s).

Organizing Your Essay
Each paragraph may be organized around a single appeal. For example, the first body paragraph may focus on ethos, the second on pathos, and the third on logos. You could also organize each paragraph around an assertion or claim that you then support with sentences discussing more than one appeal.

Integrating Quotations
Incorporate quotations from the analyzed text smoothly and grammatically into your sentences. Use a careful balance of quotation, paraphrase, and summary. Avoid overly long block quotations when shorter quotations with a mix of paraphrase and summary would be more effective.

Think About It

- What piece of writing are you going to analyze?
- What persuasive strategies does it use?
- How effective are these strategies, on their own and in combination?

A rhetorical analysis essay looks at how effectively a persuasive piece of writing uses the classical appeals of logos, ethos, and pathos. Knowing how to identify and assess these appeals can also make them easier to use in your own writing!

Evaluations and Reviews

Chapter 1: Section 2, Lesson 15

You've been asked to write a book review or evaluate a news article, but where should you start? Here is some basic information that can help you get started on the most common types of reviews while avoiding the common mistakes. Like most processes, reviews can seem less daunting if broken into steps. Try out these three steps with your assignment.

- **Gather background information:** Visit the restaurant, maybe more than once. Read the article or blog several times. Cozy up with the book for an evening and take notes. Get familiar enough with the material to notice positives and negatives.
- **Analyze and critique:** Look at everything from more than one angle. For example, the server might seem abrupt at a restaurant, but was that because she was extremely busy or trying to provide faster service? An article might appear very biased, but is the writer just appealing to his existing audience? Avoid making a snap judgement; try to be objective.
- **Present your findings to your audience:** Now that you've asked questions and gathered information, it's time to turn your notes into a draft. Consider this potential organization plan

Introduction: Identify the topic, background, and thesis
Body: Present both sides, including specific examples
Conclusion: Express and support your informed opinion

Approach the topic as objectively as possible, showing both the positive (pro) and the negative (con) sides to write a fair and logical critique. Here are specific questions you can ask in common types of reviews and evaluations:

Preparing a Review: Questions to Ask
Evaluating or Reviewing a Restaurant

- What did you notice about the décor, music, and lighting?
- How polite were the greeters and front-door staff?
- What did you notice about the cleanliness of the facility?
- How crowded was the restaurant?
- What did you think of the food's flavor, presentation, and pricing? Why?
- How fast and/or polite was the service?

Writing a Book Review

- How was the book's readability—too simple, too difficult, or just right?
- What made the plot compelling (or predictable)?
- How did the book maintain suspense?
- How well were you able to get to know the characters?
- How much did you care about the characters? Why?
- What made the resolution adequate or inadequate?

Reviewing a Play, Movie, or Television Show

- How did critics rate the show? How would you rate it?
- Which actors did a particularly fine (or poor) job?
- Was the score memorable? Why?
- What decisions did the director make that significantly impacted the presentation?
- How did the performance make you feel? Why?
- Did the show seem noticeably long or short or just the right length? Why?

Evaluating or Reviewing a Blog or Article

- How well did the writer defend his/her opinion?
- How much background information was provided? Was it enough?
- What logical fallacies or other errors did you notice?
- Were resources used and cited? How reliable did you find them?
- What goals did the article appear to have (entertain, inform, argue)? How well were the goals met?
- What made the article easy or difficult to follow and understand?
- How grammatically sound was the article? Any distracting errors?

With these questions to guide you, begin probing the topic and building your essay with examples.

Common Issues to Avoid
While you have a good sense of how to put an evaluation or review together now, there are a few common mistakes to watch out for:

- Avoid assuming the reader has shared your experience. Give enough background information so any reader can feel familiar with your subject, but be careful not to overdo it.
- Avoid bias. What is your personal reaction, or bias, to the subject? Is there anything that causes you to react in a particularly negative or positive way? Be honest with yourself about bias so you can put aside some of your opinions to conduct a more fair review.
- Avoid stating opinions without defending them. You can convince readers that your conclusions are fair and valid by providing strong reasons and accurate details when you write your review. Use examples, facts, statistics, quotations from authorities, and other credible research to support your conclusions.
- Avoid writing one-sided reviews. If you have strong feelings about the subject you are reviewing, it's easy to make the mistake of focusing only on the positive or the negative side. However, as an objective writer, you should let the readers know *all* sides of the issue. Offer your opinion at the end of review by presenting the results of your analysis in a fair manner.

Think About It

- How well do you know the topic of your evaluation?
- What do readers need to know about the topic and your experience with it?
- Have you maintained an objective position during your review?

Reviewing or evaluating a subject and communicating your analysis and conclusions to an audience is an important skill. Learn as much as you can about the subject you'll be reviewing. Ask lots of questions to cover all the angles. Make sure you are exploring both pros and cons. Then start drafting your essay!

Annotated Bibliographies

Chapter 1: Section 2, Lesson 16

During the research phase of writing a paper, you may be asked to develop an annotated bibliography. This is essentially a list of your sources (a bibliography) along with notes (annotations) explaining what each source says and how it can contribute to your paper. You might also be asked to compose an annotated bibliography without putting together a separate research project as a way to gain greater

understanding of a particular area in your field or coursework. Whatever the purpose, an annotated bibliography is organized just as you would organize the reference list for a paper, using the guidelines for a specific citation style. The notes or annotations appear in paragraph form after each bibliographical entry.

Your instructor should be the final source for guidelines on the format and content of the annotations, but most instructors agree that the bibliography should follow the citation style you'll use for the final paper, whether that's APA, MLA, Chicago, Harvard, or some other style. For more information on using these styles, see MLA Style, APA Style, Chicago/Turabian Style and Harvard Style. After each citation, you'll either summarize that source or write a summary and an evaluation of it, depending on the assignment.

Research and the Annotated Bibliography
To begin, you'll need to gather your resources, and that means finding documents that contain useful information and ideas related to your chosen topic.

As you research, cite the sources you read. Remember that you'll be using them not only in your current annotated bibliography but also in your paper's works cited, references, or bibliography as well as in your in-text citations. It's a good idea to also note important quotes and page numbers as you research so you can avoid unintentional plagiarism or searching out a page number again later for a citation.

Annotations
Next, write an annotation that summarizes and/or critically evaluates each source. Your project may require summary and/or evaluation.

Summaries
Summary annotations are relatively short, including main ideas and facts from the source material without your critique of the work. Two or three sentences are appropriate for a summary annotation unless your instructor requests more.

Pickering, K. (2019). Emotion, social action, and agency: A case study of an intercultural, technical communication intern. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 28(3), 238—253. https://doi.org/10.1080/10572252.2019.1571244

Supported by research involving the importance of emotions in the workplace, Pickering studied

the emotions of a technical communication intern as she responded to requests for unexpected

tasks and intercultural challenges. The study was based on not only which emotions were

experienced but also how they helped developed the intern's persona in the workplace.

Since the origin of this annotation is clear from the reference information before it, this summary does not include a citation after the author's name, in accordance with APA guidelines. For more guidance on writing strong summaries, see Using Your Sources Wisely.

Evaluations
Evaluative annotations focus primarily on the credibility of the author(s) and on the perceived quality of their research. If your annotated bibliography is part of a larger research project, the annotation might also discuss what you expect the source to contribute to the paper you'll write, depending on assignment requirements. For guidance in critically appraising and analyzing the sources for your bibliography, see Reading Critically to Gather Information.

Finding Quality Sources

While you're researching, try to ascertain the credibility and relevance of each source. You might read with the following concerns in mind:

- *Credibility:* Essentially, what are the credentials of the author(s)? What kind of reputation does each author have in the field? How frequently is each author quoted by other authors? Which articles are peer reviewed or published in authoritative sources?
- *Relevance:* How helpful is each article or book for your research? Are there other sources that would take precedence, perhaps published more recently? Will the information from your source be meaningful to your audience? For more about writing to a specific audience, please see [Audience Types.](#)

Composing Your Annotated Bibliography

To annotate your source, think about questions that will let you examine the author and the text itself. Although the questions might seem to overlap, you'll be looking at the material in a slightly different way. As you review each source, consider the three perspectives provided by the following groups of questions.

Questions to Ask About the Author

- What is the author's purpose?
- What arguments does the author use to support the thesis?
- What evidence supports the arguments?
- What are the author's underlying assumptions or biases? What theories drive the author's reasoning?

Questions to Ask about the Text

- What makes this text important to your project? What special contribution does this text offer?
- Where might there be discrepancies or outdated material in the author's arguments?
- Which terms have been clearly defined? Which terms should be explained in more detail?
- How sufficient is the evidence to support the arguments?
- What does the text present to refute opposing points of view?

Questions for Comparison

- How does the quality of the author's/authors' argument, method, and/or theory shape up against that of other sources in your list? In what ways is it superior or inferior?
- What major points are missing in the source in comparison to others?
- Where do the authors/texts agree? Disagree?

Finally, you can put the three perspectives together in the concise annotation you can now begin to write, as in this APA-style example:

Pickering, K. (2019). Emotion, social action, and agency: A case study of an intercultural, technical communication intern. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 28(3), 238—253. https://doi.org/10.1080/10572252.2019.1571244

Based on research involving the importance of emotions in the workplace, Pickering's case study

revealed useful strategies for negotiating agency in the workplace. The study demonstrated that

intentional, positive emotions in response to requests for unexpected tasks and intercultural

challenges can help workplace newcomers develop identify in their organizations. Additionally, the

study clearly supported the value of reflection throughout this socialization process, equipping the

new technical communicator not only to overcome the stereotype of a mere transmitter of

information but also to build an identity as a valuable contributor to the growth of the

organization.

Formatting an Annotated Bibliography
For every style covered below, list your sources alphabetically. Ultimately, refer to assignment
instructions or your instructor's preference when you format your annotated bibliography.

MLA Guidelines
If you're using MLA style, begin your document with the heading Annotated Bibliography. Alternatively,
you may begin with Annotated List of Works Cited, depending on your instructor's preference. Include
comments about each source that describe its main points or that evaluate its central and key
supporting arguments. The annotated text may immediately follow (on the same line) the works-cited
entry or begin on the next line, according to assignment instructions.

APA Guidelines
Whether your annotated bibliography is an independent assignment or part of a larger research paper,
APA provides some overarching guidelines for its format. Order and format your sources as they would
be on a reference page based on APA style. Begin each annotation one double-spaced line below its
corresponding reference information. The entire annotation should be indented ½ inch from the left
margin. In the instance that you need a second paragraph for an annotation, indent only the first line
of that paragraph an additional ½ inch from the left margin. Depending on your assignment guidelines,
provide a general or subject-specific heading, centered and in bold at the top of your annotated
bibliography:

Annotated Bibliography

Agency in the Workplace: Annotated Bibliography

Chicago/Turabian Style Guidelines
Both Chicago and Turabian Styles request specific formatting guidelines for an annotated bibliography.
However, consult your instructor for assignment-specific details.

You should center the title, Annotated Bibliography, and place it at the top of the page. Two options
are available for further formatting:

- The annotation may follow the bibliographic information, placed on the same line and in
  brackets. This option is best when you have only a few sources to annotate. While Chicago
  isn't specific about further formatting requirements, Turabian recommends placing the
  annotation immediately after the bibliographic information when the annotation is a brief
  phrase. No period is needed before or after the closing bracket of the annotation.
- The annotation may begin on a new line after the bibliographic entry. With this option, write in
  full sentences and indent every line of the annotation from the left margin.

Think About It

- How should you expand your annotated bibliography so that it isn't like a standard

bibliography?
- How much should your annotations summarize or evaluate?
- What formatting guidelines are the most appropriate for your document?

Writing annotations for your sources is an excellent way to become an expert on your chosen topic. You'll be better prepared to compose a strong research paper on the topic, too!

Literature Reviews

The term *literature review* might conjure images of flipping open your *Norton Introduction to Literature* and picking out a story to rave about or rip apart. A literature review (lit review) is really nothing of the sort. Instead of reading classics or perusing modern thrillers, you'll likely be studying journal articles and research reports. You'll be sorting through your sources, synthesizing their arguments, and comparing their conclusions. Sound exciting? Okay, it might not be, but writing a lit review *can* prepare you for a larger research project or introduce you to the most relevant research about a topic of interest. You'll find common features of literature reviews below, but please use your instructor's assignment details as the final word on what to include in your reviews.

Parts of the Literature Review
Introduction
Your readers need some background information about the topic of your literature review; that's where the introduction comes in. Let's say the lit review is about best practices in diabetes care. The introduction might include

- A definition of the main research terms, especially any specialized medical vocabulary
- An explanation of the importance of the topic (for example, why is diabetes such an important issue?)
- An acknowledgement of the range of time the research covers
- The thesis

Some details will be better suited to body paragraphs. For example, statistics about the success rate of a particular diabetic practice aren't needed in the introduction. Instead, include only enough information to set the stage, saving details for later.

Thesis
Instead of trying to argue a unique claim as you'd do in most academic papers, the lit review summarizes and synthesizes the published literature. Let's look at an example:

Recent research confirms that patient-centered practices are most effective in the fight against diabetes.

Notice that the thesis shows what the literature has already established. The writer can then go into more detail in the body about the sources and their contributions to the topic, explaining how they agree with or oppose each other. The writer isn't required to come up with a new argument or new angle in a literature review thesis.

Content
You won't just work through your sources one after another in your lit review. Instead, you will make *ideas* the backbone of your paper. You've likely been asked to include a particular number and type of sources. Consider addressing some of these questions:

- What is the main argument each source makes?
- Why is the perspective significant?
- How do the sources contribute to the thesis you stated earlier?
- Where do the sources agree/disagree?
- How are the sources similar?
- Which sources make the greatest contributions to the topic?

Quote from sources sparingly and avoid long block quotations within a literature review, as they tend to drown out your voice. When you do quote from the source, integrate it with your words like this:

DeKere (2010) supports this view, stating, "The inclusion of a registered dietician in the treatment plan

increases success rates by half" (p. 19).

The quote doesn't stand alone, and it's fairly short, so it won't overwhelm your ideas.

Conclusion
A literature review conclusion can have several goals. You might reflect on the implications of the sources you've reviewed, summarizing how the material in the review has supported the claim you made near the beginning of the review. Or you may explain how the research paper or project will proceed based on what you've discovered, including the research questions you intend to address. Finally, you might cover the gaps that exist in the literature and explain how your research will fill those gaps.

Bibliography
You'll be required to add a bibliography using the style your instructor assigns (most commonly MLA Style, APA Style or Chicago/Turabian Style). Don't forget to cite sources in the text of the lit review whenever you quote or paraphrase in addition to including a bibliography.

A Note on Organization
A lit review isn't like an annotated bibliography, so you won't just go through one source at a time. Rather, organize your sources into groups as you discuss them. These are three common ways:

- *By time period (chronological):* Each paragraph or section addresses sources published in the same time period (e.g., one decade), and the lit review is organized from least recent to most recent.
- *By theme (thematic):* Each paragraph or section describes sources that focus on a specific subtopic within the overall research topic.
- *By research method (methodological):* Research methods can be separated into two broad categories: *qualitative* and *quantitative*. Qualitative research involves feelings and stories—things you can't explain very easily with numbers. These might include observation, case studies, and interviews. Quantitative research involves graphs, charts, and numbers. Here you might find statistical analysis. You can then group the resources by method and present them that way.

Think About It

- How does each resource contribute to the main point you're making?
- How can the sources be grouped to present your ideas most logically?
- What formatting or style expectations does your instructor have?

Writing a lit review not only prepares you for an essay or research project, but it's also an essential skill if you seek an advanced degree. Enjoy the process!

Proposals

Chapter 1: Section 2, Lesson 18

When your instructor or your boss asks for a proposal, what does that mean? This isn't a proposal of marriage for sure! Yet, that analogy works well, for marriage is a relationship, and a proposal does just that—proposes either a business or academic relationship. Unlike traditional essays, proposals are purely persuasive in nature and put the most important information first. Like résumés, these documents allow readers to make a quick decision about who to accept to provide goods or services.

A business proposal argues for what work is to be done and who is to do it, offering a method to discover information, evaluate something new, solve a problem, or implement a change. An academic proposal has the same end (solving a problem) for a different purpose—to write a report.

Determining a Focus

As you compose a proposal, you can answer these questions both to create and double-check its content:

- ***What problem are you going to solve or what opportunity do you hope to present?*** This is where you explain the problem—how prevalent or important it is or that it exists at all. Show that you understand the organization's needs, and then show the problem through the audience's eyes.
- ***Why does this problem need to be solved now or why does the opportunity need to be explored immediately?*** Show the audience what money, time, health, and social concerns impact the immediacy of the issue. You should also explain the consequences of waiting.
- ***How are you going to solve the problem?*** Show that a feasible solution is possible within the allotted time. Specify what you'll do, how you'll gather data, and that your solution is the best option.
- ***Who will be involved?*** This is the chance for you to indicate how you or your company will be able to handle the project. Consider your personnel and their qualifications as well as any limitations in your organization. You should also discuss the direct and indirect benefits that you and your organization can provide.
- ***What is the timeline, or when will the work be completed?*** Outline a specific schedule showing what steps will be completed at what time.
- ***What are the approximate costs?*** Note all conceivable costs, including salaries, materials, overhead, travel, and worker benefits.
- ***What product will you provide?*** Note the specific, tangible product you'll provide and the benefits of choosing that product.

In addition to answering the questions above, be sure to

- Allow plenty of time for editing and revision
- Format the proposal so that the appearance leaves a good impression
- Allow for time to distribute the proposal
- Finish the proposal early so you can take care of any last minute concerns that arise

You must carefully consider to whom you direct the proposal; the language should be clear and concise, avoiding overuse of technical terms or jargon. Use the language your readers understand and expect to see. Because you're persuading, anticipate those readers' questions and answer them with specific data and other information. Emphasize the benefits of your solution from every angle.

Types of Proposals

While each proposal has a specific purpose, there are different types with varying structures to achieve different ends for the academic and the business worlds.

Research Proposals
These are often used as an individual or group assignment for an academic class. You want your instructor to know that your problem is meaningful, you understand it, your method will give you the information you need, you have the knowledge and resources to collect and analyze the data, and you can produce the report by the deadline. Follow this structure for research proposals:

- **Summary and Purpose**: Summarize the topic and purpose of the report in a sentence or two.
- **Problem**: State the problem and why it needs to be solved. Provide relevant background.
- **Feasibility**: Discuss which solution is feasible in the time allotted and how you know it'll work.
- **Audience**: Include who will implement the recommendation and who would be affected by it. Note which secondary audiences may evaluate your report as well as the audience's major concern or priority. Carefully state which issues you might address. Take note as to how much the audience knows and why there is interest in this topic.
- **Topics to Investigate**: Share the questions and sub-questions you'll answer, outline aspects of the problem, and explain the rationale for addressing some aspects over others.
- **Methods/Procedure**: Note any techniques or procedures you'll utilize. Explain how you'll collect the data, the specific materials you'll use, and the resources you'll research. You may also need to list complete reference citations for any potential sources, depending on the proposal or assignment guidelines.
- **Qualifications/Facilities/Resources**: State who has the knowledge and skills needed to conduct this study. Note what information is available to you about the problem or organization. Also acknowledge where you will turn for help if you run into problems.
- **Work Schedule**: Outline the time each activity will take as well as the completion date for each one. This also includes a product description approach, delivery schedule, and other appropriate information. Some potential activities are:

Gathering information	Revising
Analyzing information	Preparing visuals (as applicable)
Organizing information	Editing
Drafting	Proofreading

- **Call to Action**: Ask for suggestions for improvement as well as for approval so that you can begin work on the study.

Proposals for Action
These proposals offer ways to solve problems or recommend new programs. They often require research outside the company, such as from trade and professional journals, other online resources, and/or interviews with employees or customers. The benefits you discuss need to address each level of the audience, especially to ensure contributions. The structure of these proposals includes the following parts:

- **Executive Summary**: Reveal what you propose doing, why you propose doing it, and why the action is important.
- **Statement of Work**: Describe what you will do or what you will provide the customer. Include a product description, approach, delivery schedule, and other appropriate information.
- **Management Plan**: Explain how you'll organize and supervise any work. Note the phases and how you plan to use the resources, including how you'll address any quality issues or risks.
- **Qualifications**: Show your capability to do what you propose or to deliver the product. You may note your own or your organization's prior experience, past performance, and references.
- **Staffing Plan**: Outline who will complete particular tasks. Service contracts and résumés may be necessary for those outside the organization.
- **Contracts and Pricing**: Provide any business or contractual terms to close the business deal.

Sales Proposals
These proposals offer goods or services. The audience is a buyer, so understanding the audience's priorities is essential. For everything you offer, illustrate the benefits and explain why they're beneficial. The structure for these proposals is a little different:

- Catch the reader's attention; summarize the major benefits you offer
- Address each benefit in the order presented in the summary
- Address objections and concerns, especially regarding costs
- Note any other benefits
- Ask for approval and explain the rationale for prompt action

Business Proposal

These proposals are driven by the customer's expectations and instructions. You'll include material to show that you and your company offer the best solution. The sections for business proposals include

- **Executive Summary**: Note what you plan to do, why you need to do it, and why it's important to the company or customers.
- **Business Summary**: Include the industry overview and any legal issues to consider.
- **Marketing Summary**: Discuss the target market, your promotional strategies, the situation's analysis, competition to consider, and services to provide.
- **Financial Plan**: Cover all applicable expenses, such as indirect costs, like overhead, as well as those that may be gained or accrued from other sources.

Proposals for Funding

These proposals seek money for projects from foundations, corporations, and government agencies and are submitted by non-profit organizations to build relationships to ensure grants. Structure for these proposals varies, so the bottom line is that you should look carefully at the guidelines for the particular proposal and follow those to the letter. The guidelines are often used to help weed out applications. You don't want your proposal to be rejected because of too many pages, spacing, or even a missing heading!

Think About It

- What kind of proposal do you need to use for your purpose?
- How will you modify the structure and headings to fit the purpose of your proposal?
- What kinds of questions will you ask?

A proposal, in general, "proposes" for work to be done and by whom. It can be for academic or business purposes. Some types of proposals include research, proposals for action, sales, business, and funding, each with specifics about structure and headings. Using questions to determine the proposal's focus and keeping your audience in mind as you decide what to include in each section will ensure a strong proposal.

Abstracts

Many writing assignments require an abstract. Understanding the purpose of an abstract will help ensure the form and content are correct. Your abstract will need to convey your paper's main points as succinctly as possible. Examining what an abstract is *not* will help explain what an abstract is:

- *An abstract is not an introduction; it's more like a summary.* Although it gives an overview of the subject and supporting topics, an abstract's primary role is to provide the main ideas, including key research, that can be found in the paper. From the abstract, readers should understand your research and your findings so they can then decide whether they would benefit from reading the paper itself.
- *An abstract is not written as a proposal.* A proposal is more like a forecast of what your paper will be about. In contrast, an abstract documents the paper that you've already written.

Your abstract should be written in the same documentation style used in your paper. Feel free to use the APA guidelines below as a checklist, but always consult your instructor for specific details.

Refer to [MLA Style](#), [APA Style](#), [Chicago/Turabian Style](#) or [Harvard Style](#) for formatting specifics based on your assignment's style guidelines.

Composing Your Abstract
Content
An abstract must accurately reflect the purpose and content of its paper, so only include information that actually appears in the paper. Briefly explain the central issue or problem so readers understand your motivation and purpose for writing. Then, summarize the paper's important points, such as the objective, methodology, results, and conclusions, if applicable. Each abstract varies in the weight it gives to these points, so you'll need to decide what to emphasize. If there are one or two sources central to your argument, mention these in your abstract as well. Remember, however, to always consult your professor or read through the university's dissertation or thesis guidelines for instructions specific to your course of study.

Abstract

Many online news outlets now enable user comments, opening the door to a bevy of opinions, both educated and ignorant. These opinions may affect the media's agenda when determining stories' content. Some user-generated content includes quantifiable statements and statistical information, particularly when the news story regards policy or world affairs. However, user-generated content is often erroneous, manipulating or misstating facts or providing unverified statistics. This study reviewed thousands of verifiable statements in comments generated by users of three news sites and found that nearly 75% of the statements were factually incorrect. The research calls into question the value of online comment sections and casts a pall over the recent practice by news producers of incorporating user comments into news stories and broadcasts.

Voice
Use active voice and past tense: *The paper found that . . .* The present tense may be used to describe implications and conclusions. To find more tips on using the active voice, see [Active and Passive Voice](#).

Point of View
General guidelines suggest using third person point of view: *Research showed that . . .* However, this kind of objectivity can be confusing in an abstract, so write carefully and clearly to ensure readers know what you researched at each stage of your project. If you worked in a group and are reporting results of a study the group conducted, you may prefer to use first person: *We analyzed test results from . . .* If needed, check with your instructor to determine the appropriate point of view.

Length
APA guidelines suggest writing the abstract in just one paragraph, not exceeding 250 words. Because

your space and word count are limited, look for ways to save space. Spell expressions out initially and then abbreviate: *Society for the Protection of Manuscripts (SPM)* becomes simply *SPM* on the second mention. Exceptions are words for which the abbreviated forms have become commonplace, like *IQ* and *REM*.

Formatting Your Abstract
Placement
The abstract should come on its own page before the paper. In APA style, the abstract appears on page 2, after the title page.

Format
Set your margins at 1 inch on all sides. At the top of the page, place the page number flush right. In addition, write the heading **Abstract** in bold, centering it on the first line at the top of the page. The text of the abstract should begin one double-spaced line below the heading and should not be indented. If the abstract is part of a longer work, the abstract should be double-spaced and in the same font as the rest of the paper.

Keywords
If your instructor requests a list of keywords, place them one double-spaced line below the abstract. Begin with the label *Keywords:* and indent it one tab or ½ inch from the left margin. Following the colon, include three to five keywords describing the most significant concepts in your paper. Keywords should be in plain font and lowercase, but any keyword that's a proper noun should be capitalized. If keywords run onto a second line, do not indent; this line should be flush with the left margin. Finally, do not end the list of keywords with a period or any other punctuation.

Keywords: online news, media agenda, user-generated content, online comments

Abstracts in MLA, Chicago, or Turabian
If you aren't using APA style, the following additional guidelines should be helpful.

MLA
MLA doesn't outline many specific standards for writing abstracts, so simply share a brief summary of your paper if an abstract is required. Usually, papers written in MLA style don't include front matter, like an abstract or title page; instead, the essay begins on the first page after the appropriate heading and title. If an abstract is required and you're using MLA, refer to your instructor's preferences and format the abstract with the same MLA standards used in the rest of the paper.

Chicago Style
If you're using Chicago style, you may find that abstracts are more common for papers related to the sciences or social sciences. In such cases, the abstract should be a few hundred words or less and is usually placed at the beginning of a paper or article. According to the 17th edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style*, abstracts shouldn't contain extra elements like lists, figures, illustrations, links, cited references, or notes. In a divergence from previous editions, Chicago now requests that keywords— five to ten terms that are central to your argument—accompany abstracts because they increase a paper's or article's visibility among search engines. As always, the content of the abstract should clearly summarize your paper's content and/or argument to influence a potential audience to read your work. If your assignment requires an abstract, refer to your instructor for ultimate formatting guidelines.

Turabian
If you're using Turabian and are required to write an abstract, it should be a part of the paper's front matter, using lowercase Roman numerals for its page numbers (i, ii, iii, etc.). Your abstract should summarize the content of your paper and can be more than one page if needed. Label the first page with the heading, Abstract, at the top, leaving two blank lines between the title and the first line of text. The text of the abstract should be double-spaced and formatted to match the text in the body of the essay. As always, follow your school's or instructor's guidelines first and foremost because a list of

keywords may be required as well as other formatting and content requirements.

What Abstracts Don't Need
To write a strong abstract, avoid the following:

- Evaluating authors or theories you researched; instead, report on them
- Using nouns when there's a strong, clear verb available (say *estimate* not *the estimation of*)
- Repeating information (i.e., the paper's title)—space is at a premium

Think About It

- What major findings or theories should be included in your abstract?
- Which keywords will best describe your abstract's content?
- Where can you reduce wordiness or repetition to save space?

Fresh wording will make the abstract engaging so that readers want to read your paper. Use your abstract to present the same information you include in your paper, but phrase that information a bit differently to make your research as compelling for your readers as it was for you!

Writing Scientific or Technical Reports

Chapter 1: Section 2, Lesson 20

Consider the following sample chemistry experiment. Your job is to titrate (that is, add in carefully measured amounts) one solution into another. At each step of the process, you observe and record the results in your lab notebook. After the experiment is finished, you'll need to write a report that describes your measurements and what you observed. Finally, you'll report any conclusions to be drawn from the experiment.

Note that this process requires several steps:

- Be prepared for the experiment by doing any required reading and gathering of materials
- Understand your goal for the experiment
- Take very good notes during the experiment
- Write about your observations in an acceptable format

Once you get your observations written down, you will have composed a scientific report. The purpose of such a report is to accurately convey the details and results of an experiment to your readers, who may need to repeat the experiment in order to verify your results.

Preparation
Knowing what you're going to do in the experiment is where everything begins. After all, how can you know what to do and how to write about it if you have'nt prepared before beginning the experiment? To get ready, follow these guidelines:

- Read your lab assignment in advance to know what you'll be doing.
- If you're not sure what you'll be doing or you don't understand the material, the equipment, or the experiment, find the answers to your questions before going to the lab.
- In your notebook, record all the theories, equations, and principles that you should know in order to understand the experiment. You can use these later to explain what happened.
- Record what you think will happen in the experiment before going to the lab, and write why you're making these predictions. Such predictions are called *hypotheses*.

Observations Made Easy
If you're prepared for the experiment, you've done half the work already. Some students go to the lab unsure of what they're going to do. It's easy to misunderstand the principles behind an experiment or dive in without first thinking about potential outcomes or results. The risk here is that you could end up cramming way too many details into your notebook—details you won't understand when looking at your notes several days later.

By contrast, if you go into the lab prepared, your notebook will be ready to house the information you'll record in it. Now, all you have to do is perform the experiment and write down what actually happens.

Writing About Your Observations
Most scientific and lab reports use a standard format to present information; however, there are some variations. Before recording information, make sure you check with your professor so you can use the format he or she prefers.

The Introduction (Statement of the Problem)
Your report should have an introduction that states the problem and the purpose of the experiment. The introduction should highlight

- Any relevant background information
- Experiments or research that set the context for the experiment
- The "question," or hypothesis, for the experiment

Don't skimp on this section. The more pertinent information that you write, the more you demonstrate that you know what the experiment is about. If needed, your introduction may be more than one paragraph long.

Methods and Materials (Procedure)
In this section, describe the experimental procedure itself. Readers need to know

- The research design
- Methods and materials, such as the subjects and how they were selected
- The equipment
- Whether you did laboratory or field research
- The steps taken in the experiment

In a chemistry lab, for example, you would include the chemicals, or reagents, used in the experiment and the equipment, or tools, that you used. Be precise as you discuss what you used and what you did to perform the procedure. For example, don't tell the reader that you mixed 10 grams of sodium chloride into the mixture if you actually mixed 10.5 grams of sodium chloride. Stick to the precision that your equipment is capable of recording—no more, no less.

Usually, the methods and materials section is written in the past tense because you've already performed the experiment. Its purpose is to relate the experimental process step-by-step so that the reader can duplicate your experiment using the same methods and equipment.

The Results (Data Presentation)
This section reports on the findings of the experiment, or the data. Don't include explanations in this section. Visual aids such as graphs, charts, tables, and diagrams make the data presentation stronger, or, depending on your professor's instructions, you can write a simple narrative account of what happened. This section also may include a sample calculation (if any data reduction is involved) for one representative set from the data.

The Discussion (Conclusions)
In this final section, you'll summarize the findings of your experiment and offer some tentative conclusions. You've already told *what* happened; now tell *why* it happened. You'll discuss whether your original hypothesis was or was not confirmed by the experiment and speculate (make an educated guess) as to why. In addition, you'll share with the reader the meaning, or implications, of the experiment and describe any follow-up experiments that might confirm or extend the results.

The Discussion section is very important because it shows that you understand the experiment beyond simply being able to complete it. This is where the preparations before the experiment really pay off. Professors and professional colleagues reward people who can use writing to explain, analyze, and interpret results.

Think About It

- What steps do you need to take to prepare for your particular experiment?
- What should be recorded in your notebook before doing the experiment?
- Which elements, if any, are missing from your Methods and Materials section?
- Which key findings should be included in your Discussion?

Preparing thoroughly, making careful observations, and recording all applicable information will make writing your report easier. Your readers will appreciate your hard work all the more as a result!

Business Reports

Chapter 1: Section 2, Lesson 21

You may have been selected to take the minutes of a meeting or to conduct research on a new product. But what do those minutes need to include? What should you do with the information you learn about the product? A business report will help because it gives you a formal structure in which to present the information you gathered.

Your report may be about a company or organization's products, services, customers, markets, personnel, or policies. The purpose of any business report is to inform, offer a solution, report progress, or make a detailed recommendation. Whatever the case, your report's content should clearly present its information to a specific audience, such as colleagues or clients. Reports are often divided into sections, and they may use charts, graphs, and/or attached documents to convey information.

Understanding Audience and Purpose
Whether you've been asked to write a report by your boss or for a class, analyzing the audience and purpose of the report before writing will make it more successful.

Audience
Shape the information in your report to fit the intended audience's characteristics and interests. A report about wildlife habitats, for instance, would be different if shared with elementary school teachers versus a group of non-profit directors interested in preserving wildlife in their communities. A few basic questions can get you started:

- Who is the primary, most immediate audience?
- Who is the secondary audience, or those who might see the report later?
- What characteristics or interests does the audience have in relation to the report's topic?
- What background knowledge about the topic does the audience already have?
- What is the audience's attitude toward the topic: favorable or not?

Purpose
State the report's purpose clearly in the introduction. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the report's primary purpose, or the main reason the audience needs it?
- What is the report's secondary purpose, or an alternate reason it's needed?
- What will audience members do with or in reaction to this report?
- Why is the report important at this point in time?

If possible, conduct interviews with audience members to help answer some of these questions. The audience can reveal more about the purpose. For instance, if you want to recommend a product that your audience hasn't used before, they will need to know more about it before making a decision based on your recommendation.

Types of Reports
Knowing a bit about the type of report you need will make the writing easier. A few common short reports include

- **Recommendations:** You can use these to examine a current problem, such as in the workplace environment, and recommend a solution. In this kind of report, you should share both research and any study you've done to accurately interpret data. If your conclusions are informed and clear, your recommendation will be convincing.
- **Progress Reports:** To evaluate the progress of a project, activities, or specific issues, use a progress report. You can also present updates on a project in this type of report, whether you present them on a regular basis or at the start or completion of a project.
- **Meeting Minutes:** You can record discussion and decisions from a meeting in short reports commonly called minutes. These reports are used to share the information with team members and other applicable parties via email or in print at the start of a subsequent meeting.

Types of longer reports you may need to write include

- **Causal Reports:** If you need to explain why something happened, use a causal report. These reports are useful if you need to predict future possibilities, such as results of a decision or repercussions of a policy change.
- **Comparative Reports:** You can compare or rate specific items in a comparative report. To do so, examine specific criteria about these items and use what you find out as points of discussion. These points will help you develop strong comparisons.
- **Feasibility Reports:** To outline whether or not a plan or new idea is practical, use a feasibility report. Any research you do to plan or configure your idea should be shared in the report to give an accurate assessment of the situation.

Keep in mind that a report may have more than one purpose, so a multi-faceted approach may be appropriate. If no single type suits your needs, try combining two or three based on the needs of your audience and purpose.

Sections in Reports
Depending on your report's length and purpose, include some or all of the following sections:

- **Introduction:** In this section, state necessary background information, such as the topic's importance or origin. You may also use a problem statement or goal to report on an issue that needs addressing. The introduction should share the report's purpose, or what you're proposing and/or hope to implement. If applicable, describe any research methods you used. Close the introduction by describing the expected outcome as briefly as possible.
- **Body:** Any findings and explanation based on your research and study should come in the body of the report. This information may include, for instance, details, data, and evidence you came across that help support your plan or recommendation. If necessary, use headings in the body to help readers quickly and efficiently navigate to appropriate sections.
- **Conclusion:** Conclude by summarizing the major goals briefly, but avoid including new data or ideas. Instead, provide an overview of the report as well as noting the implications of your findings. Depending on the complexity of information in the body, you may also use the conclusion to interpret the report, perhaps through a call to action or a specific recommendation. If applicable, use the conclusion to answer the central question you posed in the introduction.

Other items may be needed in your report, depending on the assignment or situation. These could include *front matter* (table of contents, title page, abstract/executive summary, or transmittal letter) as well as *end matter* (glossary, appendix, or list of references).

Visual Components of Reports
A well-designed report keeps the audience interested. If a report contains only large blocks of text, readers will get bogged down and quickly scan certain sections, overlooking important information. To keep readers engaged, rely on the following visual cues:

- **Header:** Some companies or organizations have a header with a name and/or logo on it to signify who they are or what they represent. If so, consider including it at the beginning of the report.
- **Headings:** When reports are long and discuss a variety of topics, headings visually divide major sections. They should state what each section contains, allowing readers to quickly look through the report before getting into the details.
- **Lists:** Rather than writing out a lot of items in a single sentence, try stacking similar items into lists to make it visually accessible. Use lists only when you must since a report composed entirely of lists will be lackluster. There are two basic types of lists:
  - Numbered lists sequence information in order of importance
  - Bulleted lists show key concepts and help the audience review information quickly
- **Visuals:** Clarify your points with visuals. Choose wisely, using visuals as support rather than as a substitute for explaining findings. Appropriate visuals might include charts, graphs, figures, and tables.

- **Page numbers:** To help the audience navigate your report, incorporate page numbers according to your assignment or organization's style and standards.

Some organizations or companies have style guides that outline specific formatting and visual standards. A style guide may detail what types of fonts can be used, for instance, or what headings and sub-headings should look like. Be sure to ask if a style guide is available before designing the visual components of your report.

Usability of Your Report
A few additional tips can help to make the report more user-friendly for your audience:

- **Clarity:** Clear and direct language keeps the audience attentive. Avoid long explanations and cumbersome, confusing wording by editing or proofreading the final draft before sharing it. For tips on how to polish the report, see Editing and Proofreading.
- **Details:** Including only the most important details from your research makes the report efficient. When you define complex terms your audience may not know, take care to incorporate only as much detail or background information as needed to keep the audience engaged and prevent confusion.
- **Focus:** The original goal and purpose drive the report. To begin, identify the report's main questions and share a goal statement explaining the purpose. If you need to show progress, explain achievements clearly and specifically, using documented results or statistics as support.
- **Accuracy:** Accurate information boosts the report's credibility. To keep the audience informed and credibility high, conduct research from reputable sources and present your findings without bias.
- **Energy:** Active language makes the report compelling and motivating. If a report includes a call to action, for instance, use active verbs to deliver your message with meaning. Avoid weak verbs like *is, are, being, been, was,* and *were*. (See Active and Passive Voice for more on this topic.) Some active verbs to choose from are:

Recommend	Assess	Advocate	Develop
Examine	Evaluate	Analyze	Solve
Research	Invent	Invest	Adapt
Determine	Resolve	Guide	Implement

Think About It

- What do you know about your audience and purpose that will help you prepare to write?
- What research do you need to accurately share to heighten the report's credibility?
- Where will important details, useful visuals, and clear language make the report convincing and engaging?

A report can promote important change in a company or organization, so sharing its application, recommendations, or results should be rewarding. Good luck!

Résumé Writing

Chapter 1: Section 2, Lesson 22

Not that many years ago, no one had ever heard of a Smartphone, and 100 megabytes was an amazing capacity for a removable drive. Technology has changed drastically, and with it, the way résumés are received and reviewed has changed.

Multiple studies have shown that hiring managers spend less than a minute looking at each résumé, with some averaging as little as six seconds on each one! How do they even read them that quickly?

The answer is simple: they don't. Many companies now use scanning software to search résumés for keywords, culling the pile down to a handful of résumés that they pull for a closer read. It's critical, therefore, that your résumé be crafted for the company and position to which you are applying rather than sent out shotgun-style, with identical copies delivered to dozens of companies.

Elements of Résumés
Contact Information
Keep your contact information brief; employers don't want to sort through multiple emails and addresses, and they don't care whether a phone number is a home number or cell number. If your email address sounds less than professional (like "sassycat42@hotmail.com"), open a new account with a more formal-sounding address, and use it only for job search communication. If you have an active LinkedIn page, include a link to that as well. While your name should be in a slightly larger font, the rest of the contact information should not be—it doesn't need to stand out. If by chance you create a multi-page résumé, include the contact information on each page in case the pages become separated.

Summary
Modern résumés seldom include an objective. It's been replaced by a *Professional Summary,* otherwise called *Executive Summary, Core Competencies, Profile,* or simply *Summary.* Choose the heading that fits your style best. The summary is a 1- to 3-sentence blurb about the specific skills, qualifications, or background that you bring to the job. Someone with no experience who is seeking a job in marketing might write a summary like this:

Communication major with marketing specialty, including relevant coursework in social media marketing and marketing metrics.

A more experienced applicant might include this summary:

Marketing professional with ten-year background in social media and television marketing campaigns. Added $1.2 million in new marketing contracts last year while meeting all customer deadlines.

When writing your summary, think about what makes you stand out. Review the job description and responsibilities. What specific skills do you have to offer? Use the keywords you see in the job description to create your summary and show how you could add value to the company or organization.

Education
Most résumés take one of two directions after the Summary. If you're more experienced, you would detail your work history right away. But if you're a recent graduate or are switching fields, you'll highlight your education next. List the most recent school first, and use reverse chronology if you have attended more than one school. Here's an example:

M.A., Teaching, Morefield State University, Columbus, Ohio   2014
  - GPA: 3.83

B.A., History, Cleveland State University, Cleveland, Ohio   2012
  - GPA: 3.65

- President's Scholarship

Notice the degree and major are placed before the school. Your degree is more relevant than your school, which is far more relevant than its city and state. Using bullets points breaks the segments apart visually, helping the eyes move from section to section and catch important details. Include your GPA if it's good (3.0 or higher), but only if you've graduated recently. Some job seekers leave dates off the résumé, avoiding the risk of being seen as too young or too old for the job. Make this judgment call based on your situation. Finally, you don't need to list your high school if you're attending or have graduated from college. Listing high school graduation comes across as inexperienced, and high school graduation will be assumed if you have attended college.

Work Experience
This section may also be titled *Employment Experience, Work History, Professional Experience,* or simply *Experience.* List your jobs in reverse chronological order, starting with the current or most recent job. If you do not have a lot of paid work experience, it's fine to include volunteer and internship experiences under this category. If you have lots of experience, focus on jobs where you developed and used skills that your potential employer might find useful; omit jobs where skills might not clearly transfer to the position for which you're applying. Consider this model as you write your experience section:

Comerica Bank, Fort Wayne, Indiana   January 2012 to present
Security Officer

- Train all tellers in loss prevention, access control, and emergency response
- Communicate monthly with local law enforcement regarding risk management

If you no longer work at this job, the verbs should change to past
tense: *trained* and *communicated.* Note that both the company name and job title are aligned on the left and receive special formatting. These are the most pertinent details about the position. Also, the accomplishments are written as phrases rather than complete sentences with the goal of keeping each blurb to a single line in active language. Each accomplishment begins with a strong action verb, and the word I is nowhere to be seen. Next, each line focuses on specific details of an accomplishment.

As you write about your work experience, emphasize skills and accomplishments that match the position you're seeking. Study the job description. What is the employer looking for? What will the ideal candidate be like? How can you frame your skills and experiences to reflect this ideal candidate? If something isn't relevant, leave it out.

Avoid overused phrases like *problem solver, hard working, detail-oriented, self-starter,* and *team player.* Instead, demonstrate that you have these qualities by describing your accomplishments. Instead of

- *Worked well with a team*

try something like this:

- *Met weekly with my team to discuss goals and improve practices*

Quantify your accomplishments whenever possible. We live in a metrics-driven culture, and it's no longer enough to state that you increased sales or productivity; you need to back it up with data whenever possible. Instead of

- *Increased sales each year*

you might write:

- *Increased sales by an average of 24% each year.*

Skills and Abilities
This optional section might be more specialized depending on your field, but the general idea is to list certificates, hard skills, qualifications, programs, or abilities that fit the job you're seeking but might not appear in your *Work History/Experience* section. Include *Skills and Abilities* only if you have specialized skills; it's not the place to list hobbies or interests.

For example, a computer science applicant may list programming languages in which he is competent. An engineer may list drafting programs she's used frequently. An educator may include relevant continuing education certificates he has received.

Interests and Activities
This section is actively discouraged by most experts. Employers aren't typically interested in your hobbies or extracurricular activities as they often have no connection to the job for which you are applying. Remember, the goal of a résumé is to obtain an interview. Anything added to the résumé should have the goal of convincing the hiring manager that you should be brought in. Seldom will listing your hobbies accomplish that goal.

In rare cases, such as with a very recent graduate who has no work or volunteer experience, a writer might list interests and activities, but only if these are somewhat related to the job. Include social or civic involvement, activities that provide information about your dedication to a task, or commitments where you were part of a team.

References
Few job seekers list references on their résumés anymore as they take up valuable space and are outdated. There's no need to write "References Available Upon Request," either. Employers will assume you have references, and they assume you will supply them if requested. But keep a list of your references, including the full name of each person, his or her title, contact information, and a brief statement describing your connection. You'll want that list with you at interviews so that you can present it if references are requested.

Font Choices
Your résumé should use no more than two fonts. Any more than this becomes distracting. Readers are accustomed to serif fonts; these fonts keep the eyes moving because they flow naturally. **Times New Roman** is a common serif font. The letters flow together because of the tiny little lines at ends of the letter strokes. Sans-serif fonts, such as **Arial**, create breaks, forcing the eyes to stop. Because of this, use a serif font for phrases and lists in your résumé—places where you want the reader to keep going. Use a sans-serif font for headings and titles, allowing the reader to easily locate the important breaks.

Omissions
Certain items should never be included on your résumé because they aren't needed to determine your qualifications and could create bias against you. Avoid mentioning or including the following:

- Age, gender, marital status, political affiliations, religious preferences, or hobbies
- Your photograph
- "Salary negotiable"—employers already assume salary is negotiable
- Irrelevant jobs and activities—if you're applying for professional positions and have a few years of experience, your high school part-time job is likely no longer relevant

Proofreading
In some industries, a single typo disqualifies you from consideration. It sounds harsh, but your résumé is a one-page overview of you, and errors suggest carelessness. If proofreading isn't a strength, find a friend who can edit for you. Then find another friend to edit the new résumé. It really is that serious. (To read more tips on polishing any piece of writing, including résumés, see Editing and Proofreading.)

Length

There are many advantages of a one-page résumé. With just a single page, a second page will never be lost, no one will think you are presumptuous for including too much information, and no hiring manager will toss it in the trash because she doesn't like long résumés.

However, if your work experiences and qualifications are significant and specialized, or if the job is one that requires an extensive background, add the second page. Generally, if you have less than ten years' work experience, a one-page résumé is perfectly sufficient. Long résumés from applicants who've never worked a full-time job may appear overblown and self-important.

Keywords

Many employers now only accept résumés online or scan them, creating a searchable database they can use to identify candidates using keyword searches. Therefore, including the right keywords in your résumé is essential.

- Look in the job description for keywords. What skills or experiences are emphasized? In your *Summary, Work History,* and *Skills* sections, use some of the keywords from the job description.
- Research the company and the industry to uncover other relevant keywords the prospective employer may use to search for qualified candidates. What do you see on the company's website? What do they emphasize about their values or goals?
- Use key words specific to the field or business. Software names, course titles, certifications, and job titles are also common keywords. Which of these apply to the position and your experiences?
- Find places in your résumé to use keywords in contexts that link them to your specific accomplishments. How do your experiences demonstrate that your skills match the words in this job application?

Think About It

- How should you word your Summary to tailor it to the specific job you want?
- What extra information—such as computer skills, specialized programs, or cutting—edge courses—could be added if your résumé doesn't fill up one page?
- What items should you omit or polish in proofreading to keep your résumé at a reasonable length?
- What volunteer or internship experience can enhance your résumé, if needed?

The best résumés are targeted to one employer and one type of job. No one wants to interview a *team player* who is *dedicated* and *energetic*. Focus the various sections of the résumé on specific skills and accomplishments that are relevant to the job for which you are applying.

Cover and Thank You Letters

Chapter 1: Section 2, Lesson 23

You saw the ad for your dream job. You've polished your résumé, and your interview suit is freshly pressed in the closet, but there's another essential element in a solid application: the cover letter. The cover letter is sent with your resume to the employer with your initial application. This is followed by a thank you letter after the interview.

Your résumés should discuss your job history, but there may be skills you have or accomplishments that set you apart from other applicants. Your cover letter is your chance to highlight those unique skills. It's also a place to emphasize how your specific skillset matches the specific criteria in the job posting or to demonstrate that you understand the culture of the company to which you are applying. Ideally, you should write a tailored cover letter for each application.

While effective résumés and cover letters will get your foot in the door, a thank you note will keep the door open! Many people neglect to send these, but sending a thank you letter to all those you met with during your interview will keep your application fresh in the mind of a potential employer. It'll also set you apart from those who don't send a thank you note.

The Cover Letter
A cover letter is generally only one page. You should include a cover letter every time you submit a resume. Even if you send your resume via e-mail, write a cover letter and paste it into the email. Be sure to look at the job posting closely as some positions will require you to include the cover letter as an attachment. Not sending one is a sign of laziness or inexperience in the job search process, neither of which is helpful in getting an interview.

A cover letter gives you an extra opportunity to show the employer who you are and how your talents match the job that needs to be filled. Although your resume also answers that question, it does so in a rigid format. The cover letter allows you to tell the employer about your experiences and abilities in a targeted way. Your cover letter should explain precisely why you fit the qualifications of a specific position.

Writing an Effective Cover Letter
Use the following tips to write an effective cover letter:

- Research the company
- Write your letter to the hiring official in charge of the job
- Use a formal letter style
- Incorporate terms and phrases into the letter that the employer uses in the job advertisement
- Avoid overuse of "I"
- Be brief
- Don't repeat your resume
- Proofread carefully

A Sample Outline for an Effective Cover Letter
Paragraph 1
Express your interest in the position, using the position name in the job posting. Mention where you saw the ad. Include keywords from the posting to show how you fit the criteria.
Paragraph 2
Mention 1-2 accomplishments that demonstrate your suitability for the job and distinguish you from other applicants.
Paragraph 3
Address your desired outcome from the letter (an interview, a discussion with the employer about hiring plans or job opportunities, etc.). In addition, say how you will follow up. Thank the employer for considering your request or application.

Sample Cover Letter

10 Water Way
Waterville, Washington 11111

May 10, 2015
Don Blackman, Graphics Director
The Graphics Place
1323 Main Street
Burkes, Montana 33333

Dear Mr. Blackman:

I am writing in reference to your advertisement for a graphic artist/designer in yesterday's Montana Morning Post. My experience in web design and publishing, Photoshop, and creating graphics for in-house publications makes me an exceptionally qualified candidate for this position.

My former position, in which I was promoted twice, required I develop my skills in Illustrator, InDesign, and FontLab Studio. My specialty was exploring the potential of visual communication in all its contemporary forms, and I won three awards for my work. If you are looking for someone dedicated to fresh approaches in

Writing Memos

Chapter 1: Section 2, Lesson 24

Memorandum is a formal word for what's more commonly known as a *memo.* Individuals in practically every profession use memos to communicate business or technical information, whether within a company or organization or to outside vendors or clients. Although memos can be sent by e-mail or interoffice paper communication, they're formal messages subject to review by the company at any time.

Memos: The Basics
A memo is a short, direct note that reflects on you and your company. It's usually no more than a few hundred words or a few short paragraphs, and it's rarely over one page. A memo communicates essential information about a topic that can be discussed in more detail later. Some common situations for memos include

- Distributing the minutes of a meeting
- Providing follow-up discussions from a meeting or decision
- Sharing information, such as a very brief report, with a group
- Making a short evaluation or recommendation
- Transmitting materials, such as a long report or proposal, enclosed with the memo

Writing an Effective Memo
Knowing the intended audience of your memo will help shape its content, length, tone, and approach. Knowing the memo's purpose is also crucial. Ask yourself the following questions before you plan what to write:

- Should I inform my audience of something, such as a new policy or piece of equipment?
- Will I need to persuade my audience, perhaps to support company-wide changes?
- Do I need to convince my audience to take action?

Once you know whether you need to inform, persuade, or convince your audience, you can plan the memo more specifically:

- Find out the proper recipient(s) or group of recipients for the memo
- State a brief description of the purpose of the memo in the subject field
- Use the first sentence of the memo to state the purpose (be direct)
- Follow with three or four sentences elaborating on the memo's purpose:
    - What needs to be done by the recipient? What needs to be sent to the recipient?
    - Why does it need to be done? Why does it need to be sent?
    - How does it need to be done? How should a response be sent?
    - When does it need to be done? When should a response be sent?
- Be as concise as possible, giving only essential information
- Use a formal tone without humor or inflamed language
- Proofread your memo before sending to ensure that it's free of errors in spelling, syntax, and punctuation

Components of a Memo
Most organizations have specific memo standards that include at least the following:

- The name of the company or organization at the top of the memo, within an image of the letterhead, if available
- The word "Memo" or "Memorandum" centered or at the left margin, depending on the standards
- These four fields usually appear at the top of paper memos:
    - **To:** The name of the recipient or group of recipients
    - **From:** Your name (as the sender) followed by your job title or company department or

division
- o **Subject:** This refers to the memo's purpose and could also be included as "Re:" (regarding) if you are responding to something already under discussion
- o **Date:** The date the memo is sent appears here, and its format may vary depending on the company or organization's standards (For example, *4 April 2015* or *April 4, 2015*)
- A direct, concise opening paragraph
- A body consisting of a few short paragraphs and, if needed, a request for response
- A bulleted lists of technical information such as prices or specifications
- The end of the memo may need to include:
  - o Contact information belonging to you, the sender (which can be set to appear automatically on memos sent by email)
  - o An offer to answer questions on the content of the memo

Depending on situational needs, the memo may also need:

- A signature, if required, beside your name in the From: field, at the top
- Your initials, in all caps at the bottom of the page and followed by a typist's initials, if the memo was dictated to someone else who typed it (For example, *SPA, kd*)
- Enclosures, which are also noted at the bottom of the page (For example, *Enclosures: Vehicle Title, Certified Check*)

A memo does not need a closing, such as *Sincerely*.

Sample Memo

A&S Windows

MEMORANDUM

These four fields set the stage for clear exchange of information. Find out if your company or organization has specific standards for ordering these four fields.

To: All Employees
From: Able Smith, Human Resources
Subject: Change in Vacation Time Policy
Date: May 29, 2015

The first line of the memo clearly states its purpose so the recipient knows immediately why the memo is being sent.

This sentence addresses the questions *What needs to be done by the recipient?* and *Why does it need to be done?*

Effective July 1, there will be a change in the vacation time policy for all full-time workers. The vacation policy for part-time workers will remain the same. All full-time workers will be entitled to an extra two weeks of paid vacation every year. This vacation time must be taken between November 15 and December 31 each year because our company experiences a seasonal slowdown during these weeks.

All full-time workers should report to the Human Resources Office in the next two weeks to receive an information packet and sign up for the two weeks of their choice. Contact the Human Resources Office for further information at ext. 123 or HRO@aswindows.com. I will also be available to answer questions at ext. 345 or asmith@aswindows.com

The author of the memo includes all necessary contact information at the end so recipients can ask for more information and respond as needed.

Think About It

- What is your memo's purpose—to inform, persuade, or convince?
- How will the intended audience help shape the memo's content?
- What essential details should the memo include to communicate its message clearly?

While writing a memo, remember to follow company or organization standards, fill out the four field headings at the top, and state your purpose quickly, clearly, and briefly. If you share the essential information, use formal language, and close with any necessary contact information, your memo will be complete.

Business, Complaint, and Suggestion Letters

Chapter 1: Section 2, Lesson 25

Business letters can have a variety of purposes. A complaint letter can get your opinions heard. A suggestion letter can promote change. No matter its purpose, a business letter must use careful wording. After all, a scathing, emotionally charged letter based only on a single negative experience at a restaurant will probably make the manager just as angry as you are. Share the facts without overly emotional language, discussing the company's products, services, employees, or policies in an e-mail message or snail mail. A well-written letter will get your concerns noticed and produce a favorable response.

Writing an Effective Business Letter
Usually about a page long, a business letter allows you to respectfully state your thoughts, observations, or experiences to the appropriate company representative regarding the company, its employees, its products, or its services. The following tips will help you write an effective business letter:

- Research the company, targeting the division of the company that fits your purpose. For example, if you're writing a letter praising a sales clerk, your best bet would be to write to the managerial department, who should be aware of how well the clerk promotes the company
- Find the most appropriate person to receive the letter. For example, learn the name of the manager at the store so that you can address your letter to *Mr. Smith, Manager* or *Ms. Jones, Manager* instead of a generic *Manager*. Addressing a specific person ensures that the letter will be delivered to and read by the person most able to act on that letter
- Keep your letter efficient with straightforward, clear language rather than long, formal phrases. For example, *due to the fact that* can easily be expressed as one word: *because*
- Choose the most appropriate format. Two common formats are *direct* and *indirect*, both of which are described in detail below
- Stick to the letter's original purpose. It may feel good to let go of emotions, but keeping your letter concise (at a single page) and focused will help the recipient know how to respond
- Report the facts carefully. If your letter doesn't include crucial information, such as the restaurant number within the chain, it may be placed on the back burner because it will require the recipient to spend time finding that information before addressing your concern
- Keep your tone professional by using respectful, neutral language and avoiding negatively charged words such as *crazy*, even if you're angry. Offending the addressee won't make him or her sympathetic to the issue. Also, be sure to use appropriate wording for the salutation and the closing (see more on this below)
- Proofread carefully. Your letter should be free of grammar, punctuation, or typing errors because they'll diminish its effectiveness and credibility. Check spelling of all words, especially any proper nouns. If the manager's name isn't spelled correctly, for instance, he or she will be offended or disinterested. To see more on making your letter error-free and polished, refer to Editing and Proofreading

The Audience and Purpose of a Business Letter
Being as familiar as possible with your audience will help to set a letter's content, length, approach, and tone. Find out if there will be only one recipient or if the letter could be forwarded to others in the company. You may even want to send the letter to a wider audience if there are additional interested parties. Knowing the exact recipients can help you write to ensure that your requests are processed as quickly as possible. For instance, if the letter's recipient reads complaints from hundreds of customers on a daily basis, he or she may feel discouraged or impatient and could appreciate a considerate tone and kind words. You will also want to research what the audience can be expected to know to help you decide how detailed to be. If the person(s) reading your letter can be expected to already know technical specifications of a product, you wouldn't need to include that kind of information.

Components of a Business Letter

- **Letterhead:** If your company or organization uses a recognized letterhead, place it at the top of the page. If not, begin the letter with your address, as discussed next.

- **Return Address and Date:** If your company or organization does use a letterhead, include the date two lines below the letterhead. Check standards to see if they prefer the date at the left or right margin. If there isn't a letterhead, start by placing your return address at the left margin without your name and then followed by the date, like this:

    10 Lanie's Way

    Anytown, NY 10095

    August 8, 2015

- **Inside Address:** Include two line spaces below the return address and date, include the inside address, still flush against the left margin. This address will include the official title of the recipient if you know it along with his or her first and last names, such as
    o official title + first name + last name: *Chairman of the Board Jane Smith* OR *Ms. Jane Smith*.
    o first name + last name, + official title: *Jane Smith, Chairman of the Board*
    o first name + last name: *Jane Smith*
- **Salutation:** Place the salutation two lines below the recipient's address. Begin it with "Dear," follow with by the recipient's name, and end with a colon, like this: *Dear Chairman of the Board Jane Smith:* or *Dear Jane Smith:*
    o If you don't know the recipient's name, avoid language like "Sir" or "Madam"; use the position instead, such as *Dear Customer Service Manager:*
    o Use only the recipient's first and last name if his or her gender is unclear. For example, if you're unsure if a recipient named Jackie is male or female, simply address the letter to "Kelly Jones" rather than "Mr. Kelly Jones" or "Ms. Kelly Jones."
- **Body Text:** Begin the body of your letter two lines below the salutation. Single space the paragraphs and include one line space between each paragraph, depending on your instructor's preference or company standards. Follow this basic outline:
    o Start with an introductory paragraph that identifies who you are and why you're writing.
    o Include one or two body paragraphs next to support or justify the reason for writing. State any necessary details, such as the time, place, and names of persons involved. Remember that this is a formal communication, so keep your paragraphs brief and to-the-point.
    o End with a concluding paragraph to summarize and ask for action to be taken if needed.
- **Complimentary Closing:** Place the closing flush left and two line spaces below the end of the body text. Keep the tone professional by using *Sincerely, Respectfully, Best wishes, Warm regards,* or, simply, *Regards*. Also, capitalize only the first word (*Thank you*) if there are two.
- **Signature:** Include the signature four or five lines below the closing (check your instructor's requirements or your company's letter standards for exact placement). Type your full name—first and last—and, if available, your title below it. Finally, sign your name in the space between the closing and your typed signature.
- **Specialized Components:** Enclose any additional items with your letter by noting them at the bottom. Type *Enclosures*, followed by a colon and the item(s) enclosed: *Enclosures: Completed rebate form (1), Required UPC labels (2).* If appropriate, you may also need to disclose a typist's initials, if you didn't type the letter yourself. Include your initials in front of a backslash, followed by those of the typist: SAS/ha

Two Commonly Used Business Letter Formats
Direct Approach
The direct approach works best for technical communications, such as specifying a fault in a product or service, because it shows the company representative the issue or purpose in the first sentence, using body paragraphs to give details of support. This format will keep the letter focused on the purpose that inspired it:

- Briefly state the purpose in the opening sentence of the first paragraph. Follow the opening sentence with one or two more sentences that present the essential facts such as the date, time, and place of the experience that inspired your complaint or suggestion. Keep the first

paragraph to about three or four sentences to give the addressee an overview of the letter's content.
- Use the second and/or third paragraphs to explain the purpose in more detail. These paragraphs should let the recipient know the essential facts about the experience, product, or service that inspired the letter.
- Summarize the situation in the final paragraph, and, if appropriate, indicate the response you expect. Clearly state your expected response, to resolve the situation to your satisfaction.

Indirect Approach

The indirect approach works best for issues that could be seen as bad news or requests that will be unfavorable to the company. This approach prepares the reader with favorable or positive information before stating what's unfavorable. It builds a case for the request first before making the request. Follow this format to compose a letter using the indirect approach:

- Establish how long you've been a customer of the company or how long you've used a product or service. Establish this information in the first sentence, and use dates, if possible. To build your credibility, follow the opening sentence with one or two sentences explaining how regularly or frequently you used this product or service during the stated time period. Even if you haven't used the product or service for a long time, communicate your credibility by showing you've done research on the product or service.
- Use the second and/or third paragraphs to explain how you also value the company and its product or service. For instance, discuss how it will continue to help you in the future.
- Present the letter's purpose in the final paragraph and, if appropriate, indicate the type of response you expect. Provide a careful summary of the experience and its impact on you in the opening sentence. Continue by explaining how the experience reduced your faith in the product or service. State the expected response, if any, that you anticipate to resolve the situation, help you feel satisfied, and avoid a similar experience happening to other customers.

Think About It

- Where should wording in your letter change so that it's free of slander but remains clear?
- Who is the audience for your letter, and what do you need to know about them?
- Which approach—direct or indirect—will work best for your intended purpose?

A well-written business letter allows you to respectfully state your thoughts, observations, or experiences with a company, its employees, and/or its products or services. Using the appropriate approach, polite language, and a clear, focused format will help you get the response you need.

Personal Statement, College Application, and Scholarship Essays

Chapter 1: Section 2, Lesson 26

If you've ever applied to institutions of higher education or for scholarships to support your education, you've probably been asked to write an essay as part of the application process. These essays are a bit different from cover letters or resumes you'll write for a typical job application. They generally consist of three different kinds, depending on what the purpose of the application:

- **Personal Statements** are essays that let you discuss your career and personal goals, beliefs, and/or values. These essays can be responses to specific prompts often found in graduate/professional school application materials or in response to the basic request, strongly implied in application materials, to tell a bit about yourse Personal statements often explain who you are, who you'd like to become, what you'd like to contribute, and wl studying at the institution to which you are applying is a logical next step.
- **College Application Essays** show a college application committee that you'll be a welcome addition to the campus community. These essays should reveal your personality and character traits. They often (but not exclusively) use narrative to respond to prompts like *When in your life have you been challenged and how did you respond to this challenge?* and *What did you learn from this experience?*
- **Scholarship Essays** explain why your circumstances, skills, abilities, or other qualities make you a worthy recipient of the scholarship for which you are applying. These essays may explain your circumstances to establish your need for scholarship money, or they may explain your interests and skills to show why you're a worthwhile investment for the institution supporting the scholarship.

Determining and/or Selecting the Essay Prompt
Personal Statements

- **Generic Personal Statements:** An application that simply asks for a *personal statement* lets you decide which experience or personality traits will show the selection committee what your goals are and why you're the right person for the program to which you're applying.
- **Prompt Questions:** If the application includes a specific question or a series of specific questions, read these carefully and respond to them appropriately in the body paragraphs of the essay. Personal statement prompts may be very brief and vague, like *Summarize the three or four main reasons you'd like to pursue a graduate degree,* or they may be more specific: *In no more than 800 words, discuss your personal motivations, academic interests, relevant research or experience, long-term objectives, and your specific interest in attending the University of Wonders.* For more information on responding to prompts, see Analyzing the Prompt.

College Application Essays
Responding directly to the prompt is essential. Some college applications may only give you one question to respond to. If you try to dodge it, get at it tangentially, or discuss an altogether different topic, the application committee may see your essay as a reason to remove you from consideration. Because many college applications will give you a series of questions to choose from, you may also need to determine which question is right for you. Which question will allow you to tell a story that exhibits strengths and skills the application committee may be looking for? Consider what the prompt is really asking for. How open-ended is it, and in what directions can you go with it? Which one will keep you from having to address potential weaknesses so you can focus on your strengths? If you have the option to choose a prompt, keep the essay completely focused exactly on what you've chosen.

Scholarship Essays
Even if there isn't a specific prompt (there probably will be), keep in mind that it helps to have general knowledge of the institution, program, or individual that funds the scholarship you want. Often, you'll need to carefully explain how your goals and aspirations coincide with those of the institution, program, or individual promoting the scholarship. If you're applying for a World Wildlife Fund scholarship meant for those interested in pursuing a degree in environmental science, for example, the scholarship application materials may call for a reflective essay on how you have raised environmental

awareness in the workplace or at the schools you've attended.

Developing the Essay

As you write your personal statement or essay, consider the following questions:

Personal Statement

- How did you learn about this career, and what made you think it was your calling?
- What career or personal goals do you have?
- What personal belief or conviction do you hold that connects with the career or course of study?
- How will attending the program or school help you accomplish those goals?
- What is unique about your background and how does this relate to the question or prompt?
- How exactly will moving from where you are now to where you're thinking of pursuing your graduate or professional studies help you accomplish your career or personal goals?
- How will your skills benefit the department or program to which you are applying?
- What will you contribute to the department or program that other applicants will not?

College Application Essays

- What did you learn from the experience you're sharing?
- How did your experience change a particular belief or idea you had about the world?
- As a result of this experience, how have your actions or opinions changed?
- What makes this story a particularly good example of personal growth?
- How does your story show your growth or maturity?
- How does the story show that you're coming to a new awareness or developing a more informed worldview?

Scholarship Essays

- What institution or individual is responsible for the scholarship to which you're applying?
- What is the goal of the foundation or individual funding this scholarship?
- How do your goals, aspirations, needs, and/or particular situation fit with the spirit of what the institution, foundation or individual wishes to promote?
- What previous experiences, accomplishments, research, or employment show your commitment to values or ideas the scholarship wishes to promote?

Revising the Essay

Focus On the Prompt

When you revise, compare the prompt to your essay to help you find places where you may be straying off topic. What exactly does your story describe? How does your story compare to, address, answer, and otherwise fulfill the prompt? If you find areas that are off topic, revise to better connect your ideas back to the essay prompt, or remove them from the essay altogether.

Portray Yourself Carefully

Make your story unique by approaching it in a way that creates interest. However, be careful not to make yourself the hero of your own essay; if your science project won a contest, for example, now might not be the best time to elaborate—it may seem as though you're bragging about an accomplishment rather than demonstrating personal growth. Also, avoid phrasing or narratives that make you seem self-pitying or unappreciated. Avoid woe-is-me language or a story describing how you were victimized or mistreated by others and thus deserve some reward or compensation: You may sound as if you feel entitled.

Proofread Carefully

Read and re-read application directions. What do the directions say about the essay part of the application? If there are multiple questions in the prompt, how many are you supposed to answer? How long should the essay be? What are the formatting guidelines for spacing, font, etc.? Failing to

address these directions carefully may mean removal from consideration.

Once your essay's content and ideas are fairly polished, start proofreading for word choice and common errors like fragments, run-on sentences, or misplaced commas. To see more on this process, refer to [Editing and Proofreading.](#)

Think About It

- What exactly does the essay prompt tell you?
- How well have you represented yourself with regard to the prompt?
- What needs further revision to address the specific questions the prompt asks?

Working carefully and closely on scholarship, personal statement, or college entrance essays will help you portray yourself in a way that shows the committee who you are and what you can contribute. You may need to compose a few drafts before you've written something that's completely aligned with your prompt and represents you well. Best of luck!

Short Fiction

Chapter 1: Section 2, Lesson 27

Short fiction and novels are not simply different in length; indeed, the two are plotted, packaged, shaped, and styled very differently. Novels create whole worlds in which multiple characters move through stretches of time and space to achieve some goal or undergo a trial; most short fiction narrows to a specific point within a world, leading to an extraordinary moment, a moment like no other in the main character's life. By the end of a short story, that character has either changed (perhaps in a very subtle way) or failed to change.

Elements of Short Fiction
Characters
Short fiction is rarely highly populated with characters. Novels afford space for many well-drawn, memorable characters; short fiction often includes just a few. Deciding who your main character is—whom your story is about—is one of your earliest tasks. Creating those characters is the next task: your characters may be pure fabrication, but it's often easier to base them on yourself. You can take aspects of yourself and combine them with aspects of other people, including fictional characters. "All my characters are Scott Fitzgeralds," said the creator of *The Great Gatsby,* yet they were all different and easily distinguishable. (To find bibliographic information for this Fitzgerald quote, as well as any other works and authors discussed below, see [References](#).) Taking some essence of yourself and putting it into a fictional creation is just a bit like daydreaming. If you've never been a safecracker who teaches particle physics, now's your chance. Do a little research, fire up your imagination, and wind that character up.

Plot
The essence of plot is *causation*. Without causation, a story is a seemingly random, pointless sequence of events, such as *The king died, and then the queen died.* In contrast, says E. M. Forster, "'The king died, and then the queen died of grief' is a plot." How you see causation—how you imagine the world works—will impact the way you tell your stories.

For a story to be successful, there must be a *conflict.* Conflict comes in many forms, but the main thing to remember is that the central character must yearn for something, must want something intensely. For example, in John Cheever's "A Country Husband," the central character survives a plane crash but cannot get anyone in his family to listen to his story: all he wants at the start is to be able to tell someone about this amazing experience. Not being allowed to do this changes him in a profound way.

Once conflict has been established—and this is usually at or near the beginning of the story—it plays out to the end. Conflict is the engine that drives the plot. It moves characters to action, even if that action is to turn back, to refuse an opportunity to change; it moves readers to turn pages, to find out what happens next. In the Cheever story, frustration at not being heard causes the husband to resent his family, to fixate romantically on a young babysitter, to behave badly, to lose his grip on reality. . . And how will it all end? Readers will want to know.

Packaging Time
Once you've got a "conflict" idea, how will you tell your story? In what order will you present events? "Begin at the beginning" is sometimes the best idea, but not always. You may choose to begin at what Jerome Stern, in *Making Shapely Fiction,* calls the "last lap"—right at the point where a 75-year-old grandmother is about to jump out of a plane, instead of the much earlier point when she happens across an article on parachuting in an AARP magazine.

Beginning at the beginning is the easiest way to handle the flow of time in your narrative; if you decide to begin in the middle or even near the end, you'll need to juggle *flashbacks* and *flash-forwards.* Your modern readers will be able to handle those provided you signal clearly when you're about to time-jump. Leaving a space break (four blank line spaces) will let your reader know that there's some sort of time-jump; including temporal evidence at or near the beginning of the new section—*Five months earlier, when Bertram was home recuperating from a fractured elbow* . . . —will let your readers know

where the story is positioned in time.

Shaping the Story

Stories come in as many shapes as there are writerly imaginations. You might tell the story as a straightforward narrative with internal monologue or through a succession of diary entries, voicemail messages, or notes in bottles washing up on a hundred different shores. You could have a story within another story, or a series of letters between two or more characters. You could even choose to tell a story through emails, Facebook posts, or Tweets. Playing with story-shapes forces you to come at your creation in challenging and exciting ways.

Point of View

Stories may be told from various viewpoints:

Third Person

- Single point of view: the reader has direct access to the mind of only one character
- Dual or multiple point of view: readers access more than one character's inner thoughts
- No point of view: the reader can see all characters only from the outside; Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" is a famous example

Second Person

- The story is all about *you*, as in the infamous choose-your-own-adventure stories.

First Person

- The narrator of the story is *I*.
- The narrator of the story is *we*. (This is not nearly as common as the I-story. Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" is told from the plural first person.)

Third person conveys a certain distance between reader and story while first person is generally more intimate. You may start out your story using, say, third person single point of view and then decide halfway in that it would be better told in the first person.

Style

In contrast to *substance*—the content, structure, shape, and viewpoint of a story—*style* is the way you use language to convey that substance. Style involves a number of literary elements:

Tone

Your third-person tone may be formal or informal, light or dark, literal or ironic, portentous or offhand. If you're writing in the first person, there are as many tones as there are individual attitudes about the world: playful, angry, envious, resigned, terrified. Whatever tone you adopt will color your narrative and affect your readers. For more details on tone, see Consistent Tone and Voice.

Figurative Language

Figurative language (similes, metaphors, allusions, etc.) is not intended to be flowery but to communicate precisely with readers. To borrow again from Jerome Stern, simply telling your reader that a character's hair is auburn won't contribute greatly toward what readers understand about her. Hair color is not character. Think of it this way: describing your character's hair as the color of mahogany will evoke positive, complex reader responses (the color of wood in turn calling up associations like *burnished* and *fragrant*). Describing it as the color of beef liver, on the other hand, will provoke a repulsive vision! In either case, the exact same color of auburn is described, but the effect is different. When literal descriptions don't quite convey what you want your readers to imagine, use figurative language, and use it precisely. Show your readers what you see in your mind's eye. For more ideas, see Figurative Language.

Showing Versus Telling
This technique could also be described as *Scenes versus Summaries.* When planning your story, you should have an idea of which events you want to show in detail and which you want simply to describe. A *scene*, whether brief or extended, shows characters moving through time, doing things, and perhaps speaking to one another. A *summary* simply sums up these events. For instance, in the Cheever story, the near-crash is presented as a scene: simply to sum up this terrifying experience would detract from its power. But when the husband drifts through suburban life afterward, much of the "drifting" is summed up. If the entire story were shown rather than shown and told, it would be overly lengthy and boring in spots. Summarizing/telling allows writers to skip through the less interesting events to focus on the significant ones.

Dialogue
When characters speak to each other, their relationships will be shown in the words they use—and don't use. Characters who know each other well won't have to spell everything out. Characters who are strangers will speak more formally, possibly more warily. Dialogue is one of the fiction writer's most powerful tools: it propels plot and embellishes character. When writing dialogue, test your lines by speaking them aloud. Do they sound like natural speech? Let your ear be your guide. But remember that natural speech is full of *umms* and *uhhhs* and *likes* which are much more boring to read than they are to hear; your dialogue should actually sound better than natural!

Think About It

- Which short story elements have you included in your beginning drafts?
- Which story elements do you now want and need to include?
- Which elements are your strongest? Which need more development?

Trust your readers. Understand that they know how the world works, and when they read your fiction, they're bringing their own experiences to the story. Remember as you write that your job is to take what's in your own head, your own imagination, and communicate it to those readers, who will take from your story what resonates most deeply with them. The more fully you imagine your story, the more powerful it will be.

Poetry

Chapter 1: Section 2, Lesson 28

Perhaps you enjoy writing poetry but would like to become a better poet; perhaps you're not sure about poetry, but you've been assigned poetry writing in your composition or creative writing class. There are innumerable techniques and options to choose from as you shape your poem. You'll discover some below. Read on!

Writing Poetry
As you set out to write a poem, you'll move through two crucial stages: creating and revising. Below are some tips to help you get started:

Creating
The best way to begin is to simply start writing. You can start by getting a notebook reserved for writing. In it, record words, images, phrases, and ideas that strike you as interesting or appealing. You may not use all of them, but when you're stuck and need inspiration, you can grab an item from this list as the starting point for a new poem.

Freewriting is a great way to create a poem. Freewriting starts with observation. When you see a person or scene that impacts you, take mental notes, and then, as soon as you can, sit down to write about these memories as they come to you. Try freewriting for a predetermined block of time, perhaps by writing for ten minutes without stopping. You might think of a memory in pieces, writing each piece on its own. Don't feel like you need to use complete sentences. Just get the memory in writing, and then, when you're done, sit back and see what you've got. You can also freewrite by using a line from a poem you like as the core of your own poem. Start by writing down that line and then spend your freewriting time building on it. Make sure to cut the borrowed line entirely when you revise.

Revising
After generating material to work with, you're ready to think about revising. How does the mass of words in front of you become a poem?

No one writes a perfect poem the first time. The American poet Elizabeth Bishop kept unfinished poems tacked to her walls for years, waiting for the right word to complete them. Each time you revise a poem, treat it as if it's a new creation. Time is the best method; even a few days can give you a clean perspective. Reading the poem after time has passed will help you see which words to change, which lines to tinker with, and which images to enhance.

Along with time, use these strategies to revise:

- Read or sing the poem aloud, tapping your fingers to its rhythm
- Read it backwards, line by line to see each line individually
- Have someone else read the poem to you to appreciate it from a different perspective
- Tack it to a wall so that you'll see it periodically as you're doing other things

As you revise, trust your instincts, but also think about the questions below:

- ***Is the language concrete?*** Some of the best poems talk about abstract concepts by using concrete language. Concrete nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and strong verbs convey clear ideas that refer to concrete objects or to abstract ideas like love, peace, and anger. You want readers to get close enough to feel the way you do because when readers can see and feel a message, the poem can move them. For example, *a bush with some flowers* doesn't have nearly the same impact as *the Rose of Sharon in the backyard of my childhood home, where mom and I hunted for caterpillars in the spring time.*
- ***What tools will add sound effects?*** Poetry is about using language to make music. It takes

advantage of all the sound patterns in language: *consonance* (similar consonant sounds), *assonance* (similar vowel sounds), *alliteration* (same initial sounds), and *rhyme* (similar word endings, like *trance* and *glance, darkness in* and *discipline, daze* and *always*).

- **How can rhythm help convey a message?** Poetry also makes use of *repetition* (the recurrence of phrases or sentence structures and *meter* (the patterns of stress in words). You can place stressed syllables in opposition with unstressed syllables in a way that provides movement and momentum. Consider this common childhood prayer: **Now** *I* **lay** *me* **down** *to* **sleep** */ I* **pray** *the* **Lord** *my* **soul** *to* **keep***. The bold words are syllables that receive more verbal emphasis or punch. In this case, they're always countered by *unstressed syllables*. Countering stressed syllables against unstressed syllables produces an unmistakable rhythm, evoking a steady, rocking beat.

- **Which conventional grammar rules might be bent or broken?** Poetry lets you move past grammar rules in favor of music and meaning. As you reread your poem, look for run-ons, comma splices, and sentence fragments, just as you would in an essay. Then ask whether they serve a purpose. For instance, does the comma splice create a rhythmic sensation that you want, as in this line from "O Captain! My Captain!": "My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still"? (To see bibliographic information for this poem and others quoted below, see [References.](#)) Look for places where language is used creatively. For example, does subject–verb reversal help convey a more striking image, as in "While follow eyes the steady keel"? If these variations work, then keep them. Don't just break rules on a whim; make purposeful choices for rhythmic reasons.

- **Are my images working as well as they can?** With all this talk of concrete language and sentence construction, it should come as no surprise that images are crucial to good poetry. An image can use the senses to make an idea clearer. Rather than saying *My feet moved slowly*, for instance, create an unexpected image through the sense of touch to convey just how slowly these feet were moving: *My feet shuffled me through a field of mud-covered feathers.*

- **What similes or metaphors could add other layers of meaning?** Poets often compare things to each other through *simile* (using *like* or *as* to compare one object with another) and *metaphor* (replacing one object with another).
  - Theodore Roethke placed a simile in the first stanza of his well-known poem, "My Papa's Waltz": "The whiskey on your breath / Could make a small boy dizzy / But I hung on like death." No matter what, the speaker is not letting go, and the simile *hung on like death* conveys that effectively.
  - Shakespeare used a metaphor to talk about the sun when he wrote, "Sometimes too hot the eye of heaven shines." Here, *the eye of heaven* adds a layer of meaning because it's unexpected and stands in for a commonplace word.

For more information on writing poetry with similes and metaphors, see [Figurative Language.](#)

Types of Poetry
One of the best ways to discover the possibilities for writing engaging poetry is to read poetry as much as you can. While there are a myriad of different types of poems, knowing two common categories can help you get some initial ideas about the poem you want to write.

Fixed Forms
A fixed-form poem is one that fits a traditional set of rules about repetition, meter, rhyme, and other patterns. For example, you may have seen or needed to write a sonnet, which is a short poem of 14 lines that are divided into two, three, or four sections. Sonnets can follow a number of different rhyming patterns and are usually written in *iambic pentameter.* These two lines are from an English (or Shakespearian) sonnet: "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? / Thou art more lovely and more temperate." English sonnets are made up of three four-line stanzas (called *quatrains*) and one two-line stanza (or *couplet*), but the Italian or Petrarchan sonnet consists of one eight-line stanza (*octave*) and one six-line stanza (*sestet*).

There are other fixed forms, such as the villanelle (a poem of 19 lines divided across six stanzas with a very particular rhyme scheme), the terza rima (with an interlocking rhyme scheme), and the rondeau (15 lines within three stanzas using a refrain throughout). However, you might prefer a haiku, which doesn't rhyme but is a fixed form—three unrhymed lines of five, seven, and five syllables, respectively.

Narratives
Narrative poetry isn't recognized by a system of set stanzas or rhyme schemes. Instead, narrative poetry tells stories. If you have a story to tell and need to write a poem, consider crafting an epic, a romance, or a ballad. An epic and a romance are typically longer poems. Epics tell about a hero or heroic actions while romances share love stories in lyric verse or verse that sounds like a song. A ballad also tells a story, but it's usually short and is written with the intentions of being sung.

Free Verse
A less formal type of poetry is known as free verse. These poems don't fit a traditional set of rules. They may still use repetition, meter, rhyme, and other patterns, but they don't have a set form to follow. Instead, you get the chance to create your own set of standards for how to use those tools. T.S. Elliot's *The Wasteland* is a well-known example of free verse:

The barges wash
Drifting logs
Down Greenwich reach
Past the Isle of Dogs.
Weialala leia
Wallala leialala

Free verse isn't restricted by rhyming patterns or formatting, and it can, as seen here, use creative word choice to express its message. Free verse poetry isn't easily broken down into "types" since it relies on the natural rhythm behind the emotion that inspires the poem's message. A free verse poem may or may not use rhyme; instead, it could emphasize its message through repetition. Free verse can even be playful, as in a spatial poem, which uses its structure to create an image on the page of whatever it is written to express.

Think About It

- Which type of poem suits your purpose best?
- How could you use devices like assonance or consonance to make music through the language of your poem?
- Where can you continue playing with the rhythm and structure of your verse?

Check with the assignment guidelines or your instructor first, and experiment with topics and forms. Certain topics will be easier for you to adapt to certain types of poems. Finally, be willing to adjust the language and images and words as you compose and revise. A well-crafted poem comes over time and is something to be greatly appreciated by you and your readers!

Digital Portfolios

Chapter 1: Section 2, Lesson 29

Have you ever wanted to make a radical change? To reinvent yourself? Portfolios—specifically digital portfolios—can let you do that in electronic form. Through your portfolio, you can see how much you've changed as a writer as well as project how much change you still plan to make.

Portfolios have long been included in many writing classrooms and as a requirement for certain types of employment. Today, however, you may be asked to compose a digital, or electronic, portfolio that reveals your writing progress over time. A thoughtfully arranged digital portfolio will showcase a collection of your work that is rich with various media and relies on intertextual and hypertextual links. Moreover, because it's digital, you own it, meaning you can take it with you long after the class is over, or even after your degree is in hand.

Portfolios Go Digital

Whereas print portfolios often told a single, linear story, digital portfolios can expand and are multi-faceted. Kathleen Blake Yancey, the forerunner in both print and digital portfolios, has established three main steps—known as *collection, selection,* and *reflection*—to follow when creating your portfolio:

- Collect all applicable work
- Select samples to share in the portfolio
- Reflect on the work in order to think about what's been learned, to decide which work is strongest and why, and to review the entire portfolio and plan for its future impact

This three-step process is the basis of strong portfolio design. By following these steps, you'll be prepared for the next stage, which is crafting the portfolio toward a specific purpose or type.

Types of Digital Portfolios

Digital portfolios communicate different types of information:

- Connections between academic and extra-curricular learning for admission to higher education or vocational opportunities
- Knowledge gained during a specific college course or departmental program
- Evidence of meeting standards for a professional certificate within your career field
- Qualifications needed for employment or job-related accomplishments for promotion
- Representation of lifelong learning for participation in public service

Your Digital Portfolio's Contents

Developing your digital portfolio should start with basic requirements, as with any other assignment. What does your instructor want you to include in the portfolio? How many drafts of each essay or project should be included? What should you cover in your reflection? Beyond the instructor or program's requirements, try to make the portfolio dynamic and flexible you can adapt it over time; it may continuously undergo changes and be influenced by your course, your instructor, your department, your school, or, more importantly, what you continue to learn about yourself as a writer and composer.

The Reflection

This element is the heart of your portfolio. It allows you to evaluate your work and note how far you've come in your course or program. Ask yourself, "What are the different learning experiences that will really show what I've accomplished?" Then, use both the explanation of how you composed various assignments and your reflection to introduce your portfolio. Whether a letter, a short essay, or shorter messages scattered throughout the works in the portfolio, the reflection guides your audience through everything you include. You may have specific reflection questions to answer, but some general ones to keep in mind include the following:

- What did I learn and how did I learn it?

- Which parts of my portfolio show all that I have learned?
- Which goals did I meet (or not), and how does the content illustrate these goals?
- How can I use these learning experiences and reflection to impact my future?

Links

The links in your portfolio will probably come from both within your writing and from outside sources and will connect your audience to the various work samples you select and share. By linking to a final draft from a rough draft, for instance, your audience will have a better glimpse of your progress as a writer. You can also provide links to works outside your portfolio (such as from other classes or extracurricular activities), depending on your instructor or program requirements. Consider including the following items as you plan out your portfolio:

Homework	Lab reports	Assignment Drafts (1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc)
Class projects	Spreadsheets	Peer Review Notes
Journals	Presentation Notes	Awards

As you decide what to include and how to present it, an important goal is to invite your audience to progress through your portfolio along a variety of paths so that the experience of reading and assessing the selected materials is as engaging and dynamic as you want yourself to appear.

Technological and Designer Considerations

To provide a hassle-free audience experience, rely on these technology tips when creating your portfolio:

- Identify early how the portfolio will be accessed (online or otherwise)
- Use graphics, sound, and video as appropriate to fulfill portfolio requirements
- Link the portfolio contents through a variety of paths (with a "table of contents," with cross referencing through hyperlinks, etc.) to appeal to different audience members, keeping the following questions in mind:
  o Where should my links come—on the left, at the bottom, or at the top?
  o Which elements will link to outside sites, depending on portfolio requirements?
  o What should I link "back" to, or how should I help the audience return "home"?
- Consider design elements—how color, headings, font choice, and more display you as well as the learning process you've experienced; to do so, answer the following questions:
  o How should the background color and font color contrast one another as well as convey something about me?
  o How much bigger should font sizes be for headings versus text?
  o What font will best represent me and the learning process explained by the portfolio?
  o What special design features (if any) should I use to show my skills and interests?

Your Audience, Now and in the Future

The way your instructor evaluates your digital portfolio is an important part of helping you become a stronger writer. Because the portfolio is electronic, the evaluation should be as well. Prepare for this by making the portfolio digitally engaging through both content and links.

Because each digital portfolio is unique and because each composer (you!) is different, there isn't a list of common standards for all digital portfolios. Nevertheless, there are some best practices to keep in mind:

- Your learning outcome or goal should be present in each element—the reflection, the selected works, and the way all of it is presented.
- You should aim to use the technology to its full potential to show evidence of your skills as an arranger and composer.
- Your portfolio should make your electronic, or online, identity clear through personalized information that establishes you as a credible author of a multi-faceted text.
- You should base the portfolio's contents and arrangement on the current audience (your instructor or program adviser) as well as future potential audiences (employers, family, friends), considering the ever-changing nature of lifelong learning goals.
- Your portfolio's reflection can come at the beginning, the end, or as the central navigational

feature that explains how instruction and feedback has influenced you as a writer/composer.
- You may wish to include your online social identity as an element of your portfolio, since employers often research this information on their own.

How to Share Your Portfolio
Depending on the audience, you may have several options for saving and sharing your portfolio:

- On your university-provided URL or web space
- On a website URL you purchase or adapt from a free website design site
- On a CD or DVD you create to share with a prospective employer

Think About It

- What documents reveal the progress you've made as a writer?
- What points will explain how this progress is reflected throughout the portfolio?
- What links make navigating the portfolio easier for your audience?

Remember—your portfolio is live and can change as you see fit. Once it's been evaluated, take it with you; make changes to it as more fantastic learning experiences come your way!

Writing an Art Analysis

Chapter 1: Section 2, Lesson 30

Visual analysis essays, also known as art analyses, allow you more freedom than many other types of writing. An art analysis essay has no defined conventions regarding length and structure, so the scope of your essay might be broad or very narrow depending on your assignment guidelines. For example, an analysis of a photograph might limit itself to the use of lines and their significance to the photograph's subject. Alternatively, an analysis might connect a painting's setting to an important period in the artist's biography and artistic development.

Focusing Your Art Analysis
Art analysis essays generally focus on one or more of the following topics: the element(s) or subject(s) of the visual or artistic work, the artist who created the work, or the field in which the work is situated.

Artistic Elements
One important consideration in analyzing a piece of art is usually the composition or elements of the work itself. For example, what kind of brush strokes does a painting use? What about its use of color, lines, and shapes? Unusual choice of material, veneer, or application might also be relevant to your analysis. Similar questions apply to photographs, sculptures, etc. An essay analyzing Alex Colville's painting *To Prince Edward Island*, for instance, might look at the painting's colors or how the painting's underlay visually depicts static fuzziness.

The Subject
Equally important as the composition is the subject of the artwork itself, meaning the person, place, thing, or idea that the artwork is intended to depict. For example, an analysis of Colville's painting might consider the painting's true subject. Is it the woman in the foreground with binoculars or the apparent boating trip to the island? Or is the subject the relationship between the woman and the man in the background? An analysis of subject may be possible even for an abstract work in which the intended subject is not apparent or even determinable.

The Artist
Another consideration is the artwork's connection to the artist as a person. Such an analysis might look at the artist's biography and how the artwork is situated in the artist's life, or it might instead consider where and when the artist created the work and how that time and place relate to the work. For example, Colville's painting depicts a boat ride to the Canadian province of Prince Edward Island. Did Colville visit the island in the 1960s when the painting was created? Did he long to visit? Or did something else inspire the work? How does the painting contrast with his work as a war artist? These questions illustrate possible ways an analysis might consider a work in relation to an artist's biography.

The Field
A final consideration is the way the artwork relates to a broader field of art or to an artistic school of thought or theory. For example, does the work illustrate a particular artistic, political, aesthetic, or cultural movement? Or does the work instead attempt to break free of or to deconstruct a particular movement, genre, form, or convention? For example, how does Colville's painting relate to the artistic movement of Precisionism with which he was associated, to the European art that he studied, or to the "Group of Seven" artists who preceded him? Analyzing the way an artist either illustrated or worked against a broader artistic movement or trend is a common method to relate a work of art to a broader field.

Essay Structure
An art analysis essay isn't bound by common conventions regarding length and structure, so the length, structure, and development of your essay will depend specifically on your assignment guidelines. An art analysis essay in a college-prep or foundations class might use only one or two body paragraphs to develop its analysis. In contrast, an art analysis essay for an advanced or graduate-level art history class might use 10 or 20 pages to develop its analysis in a sustained way. Review your

assignment guidelines carefully to determine the necessary length and any other requirements for your essay.

Think About It

- How does the artwork you're analyzing use visual elements to convey meaning?
- Who or what is the subject of the work, and how does the work represent or obscure that subject?
- How does the artwork relate to a broader artistic field?
- How does the work connect to or distance itself from the artist's life, place, and time?

Consider all aspects of an artwork as you determine how you'd like to focus your essay.

Speech Outlines

As a student, you might be asked to give a speech for a variety of reasons. Your instructor might require each person in your class to speak about a topic of your choosing. Alternatively, you might present a valedictorian address to a graduating class or recap your internship or field trip in presentation form. The more formal the occasion, the more likely you will want to use some form of mnemonic device, such as a speech outline. A speech outline is distinct from a slide or multimedia presentation, such as PowerPoint. Whatever the context, creating a speech outline can help you stay on topic.

An Outline, Not an Essay
Remember that you're creating an outline that will help you remember your key points and deliver your speech effectively; you're not writing an essay or a series of paragraphs to read out loud. Audiences can easily tell when a speaker is simply reading word-for-word from a print-out, even if the sheets aren't visible—the speaker's tone of voice is flat and disengaged, and the effect is lackluster. Delivering a speech from an outline or other mnemonic device will ensure that your discussion seems genuine and lively and will allow you to better connect to the audience.

Sections of a Speech
Ideally, your outline should have at least three sections: the introduction, the body, and the conclusion. If you need to turn in your speech outline for class credit, follow any special guidelines your instructor provides about the length and format. If you're creating the outline for your own benefit, you have free reign to structure it, but keep the following guidelines in mind.

Introduction
In your introductory section, list a few of the key points that your audience should know first. To decide what your audience needs to know about your topic, consider the purpose of your speech. Are you speaking to inform the audience about a new kind of electric car? To convince the audience to unplug from their smartphones? To evaluate a new university energy conservation policy? Essentially, what is your topic, and what key details does the audience need to know before you get into the body of the speech? For example, if you're speaking about a local river that needs to be cleaned up, your introduction might mention its location and current status of contamination.

Body
In your outline's body section, list the key topics that your speech will cover. If, like most people, you need a bit of help to stay on track, add some brief details about each topic. For example, your speech about the river clean-up might cover solutions as one topic, funding options as a second topic, and estimated timelines as a third topic.

Conclusion
In your conclusion section, list any final points you want to emphasize. While most conclusions will briefly summarize the speech's main topics or main idea, your conclusion might also include a key reflection or two or a word of advice. For example, your speech about the river clean-up might share how audience members can get involved and who to contact (town officials or volunteer leaders, for instance) to aid in the clean-up efforts.

Using Bullets and Other Devices
Unless your guidelines say otherwise, feel free to use devices such as bullets, numbered or lettered lists, or other formatting devices in your outline. These devices can help you present notes in a concise way while also serving to highlight key pieces of information.

For example, you could use a bullet list for your introduction, another for each topic in the body of your speech, and another for your conclusion. If you want to make your outline even more detailed, consider using sub bullets, numbers or lettered subsections to include notes about each topic or

section.

Headings can also help you identify the sections of your speech. For example, if you're placing your outline on a single sheet of paper, you could have one heading each for your speech's introduction, body, and conclusion. Alternatively, you could include additional headings, such as a heading for each topic in the body of your speech. If you are using notecards, each section of the speech might be placed on a separate notecard, making headings less necessary.

If you wish, you can also use parentheses to indicate how much time you plan to spend on each section or topic, indicating the minutes each section or topic should take: (5 minutes) (10 minutes).

Choosing a Medium
As you prepare for your presentation, you should also consider how you will review your outline during your speech. If you will have a podium in front of you, you might find it easiest to bring your outline on a printed page. If you'll be giving the speech without a podium, you might prefer to use a set of notecards. Either way, your outline should be easily readable so that you aren't struggling to decipher a word or phrase. Use a printer for your outline or print by hand as neatly as possible.

Think About It

- What key topics will you cover in your speech?
- How detailed do you want your outline to be?
- How will you physically compile and review your outline?

Slide Presentations

Chapter 1: Section 2, Lesson 32

Developing a slide presentation is a common assignment, usually as a component of a corresponding oral presentation. Creating written text for a slide presentation is slightly different from [creating an outline for a speech](#) since a speech doesn't use audience-facing slides. The writing and communication skills used for slide presentations are crucial for a variety of careers and fields, so it's helpful to understand how to present your ideas effectively in this concise visual medium.

A slide presentation can serve a variety of purposes, whether argumentative, informative, or analytical. When creating presentations as part of your coursework, your audience will usually be your classmates, but it might also include students from other classes, college administrators, or community members. For example, you might be asked to inform your audience about a problem, such as the need for your town to build a new public wharf, and offer solutions, such as selling raffle tickets, fundraising door-to-door, or offering naming rights. Alternatively, you might be tasked with arguing a position, such as the need for the federal government to step in with funds for the new public wharf. Because of the flexibility and creativity of this medium, a slide presentation can sometimes seem more difficult to develop than an essay, but that isn't the case.

Creating Slides

A slide presentation is a unique form of communication used to break down an idea or topic into key points in a visually concise way, usually with both text and graphics. It's helpful to first organize your topic into key points for your presentation. Which main considerations do you want to highlight for your audience? These key points will be the basis for the content slides in your presentation, and your content slides will follow the order of your presentation. For example, a presentation about Sandy Cove's wharf might discuss fundraising solutions in order of ascending or descending relevance or impact. Another presentation might use chronological order.

Beyond your content slides, your presentation will likely include other slides that have an organizational purpose, such as a title slide and concluding slide.

Title Slide

Include your name and the title of the presentation first, such as *Sandy Cove's New Public Wharf: Fundraising Options*. The slide may also include the date or other information, depending on your assignment requirements.

Introductory Slide

Present an overview of your presentation, but do so creatively based on your topic. For instance, the introductory slide might present a bullet list of your key topics, such as your three or four primary fundraising strategies. Alternatively, your slide could include only a single question that relays your presentation's purpose, such as *How can Sandy Cove raise enough money to build its wharf by August 2020?* When creating your introductory slide, consider a variety of options and determine what approach is most likely to interest your audience in your presentation while focusing on your purpose.

Content Slides

Content slides present the main detail of your presentation. For example, your presentation on Sandy Cove might have one slide for each fundraising option, or it might have three or four slides for each fundraising option depending on the level of detail and the length of the discussion. It's not necessary to use a slide for every detail or subtopic; the bulk of the information needs to come from you and your discussion, not your slide text. Keep written slide content brief. Most presenters avoid paragraphs and complete sentences and instead use phrases and bulleted lists. Whatever you decide, include only the most important illustrative details on your content slides; secondary details can be left for your discussion.

Concluding Slide

This slide most often presents a list of the points you addressed in your presentation, but your strategy may vary depending on the purpose of your presentation. For example, the slide could suggest actionable goals for the audience to take away to assist with fundraising for the wharf. The slide could include suggestions for further reading or reflection, or it could list contact details for you or a related organization, such as the phone numbers or email addresses of Town Hall officials who will help organize fundraising efforts.

References Slide
Your final slide should list any references related to the information presented in your previous slides. Check with your instructor about the preferred format for your bibliography, particularly if research was required.

Formatting Slides
Consider creating a slide outline in Word or on paper before switching to slide presentation software. That way, you're less likely to become frustrated as you try to draft while learning the software or app functions.

Remember to limit slide text to the most relevant details. You might use a common strategy like a bulleted list of illustrative details on each slide. Here's an example of a content slide about fundraising for Sandy Cove's new wharf:

Fundraising door-to-door
- Need for volunteers to be screened & registered
- Proper identification tags for all volunteers
- Defined days/times when volunteers will be out and about

In this example, the core information is presented with a list. Notice that this slide doesn't incorporate any complete sentences. There's a brief heading that establishes the key point and several relevant details that illustrate it. The slide uses circular bullets, but other devices such as diamonds or squares are likely acceptable.

If possible, proofread all slides on paper rather than a screen to identify any typos and errors. You might be embarrassed to find a typo in your essay, but imagine noticing a typo when presenting in front of a live audience!

Think About It

- Are you presenting to inform, to persuade, or for another purpose?
- How many key points will your presentation cover?
- Which details are important enough to include on each slide?

Answering these questions will help you brainstorm ideas to better organize and develop your presentation.

Analyzing Your Audience

Chapter 2: Section 1, Lesson 1

When you sit down to write, keep in mind that everyone has her or his own set of beliefs, opinions, and values. Your audience members will have varying degrees of knowledge and understanding when it comes to your topic. And, depending on where they work and/or go to school, where they come from, and how they've been asked to think about the ideas you're discussing, they will all have different sets of expectations when they read what you say. All of these things ultimately affect how readers will respond to your message. To help increase your awareness of the group you may be writing to, ask some questions about them before you sit down and write and as you revise. These questions fall into three different categories:

- Who exactly you're writing to
- What you hope to accomplish by writing to them
- How or where the document will be used

These concepts will affect your message as well how you might choose to get it across. In general terms, the people you're writing to are your audience. What you hope to accomplish is your purpose. The situation in which the message is used is its context.

Audience
Your audience members may vary wildly, but some examples are the students in your class or those who attend the same college or university as you. The audience may be your instructor or a series of instructors who will evaluate a portfolio of your writing at some point during the semester. For instance, you might find out about the audience in the assignment if your instructor asks you to write to an audience of "reasonably well-informed adults who are skeptical of your claim." Finally, because of the Internet, your audience could also be a vast online community. If you're writing an online review of a novel, anyone around the world with Internet access and a vague interest in that book could be considered an audience member.

Purpose
The purpose of your writing is what you hope to accomplish. For example, if you had to explain an assignment to a friend or family member, you would probably start by saying, "I'm writing an essay for my English 102 class that involves arguing about cultural assimilation." The purpose, then, is for you to complete an assignment to demonstrate understanding or proficiency and earn a grade. To write effectively in a classroom setting, you might find it helpful to think beyond the academic exercise you're completing and consider how the assignment you've been given might fulfill a broader purpose to inform and/or persuade your potential readers.

Context
The situation in which you use a message is its context. Much of the writing you do may be for a particular class; being aware of context means, in part, understanding the expectations of your instructor in terms of what he or she may expect of an assignment when you turn in the final draft. Context applies outside the classroom as well: different contexts ask you to use different language: you wouldn't typically write to an instructor the same way you'd write an email to a close friend.

The chart below includes different questions you can ask yourself when thinking about how to write out your ideas. Of course, you need not limit yourself to the questions below. They are meant to be a starting point for you to begin analyzing your audience:

Audience	Purpose	Context
Who will be reading, listening to, or using this material?	Why is this communication important?	What are the organizational settings in which the document will be used?

• Answers to this question will vary: your instructor may be one response; however, your assignment may ask you to imagine a more diverse group of readers. A group of community members could be another possible answer; just your fellow students may be a third.	• Importance could mean that if your audience doesn't get the message, they'll all die, or importance could mean that they may miss out on an ice cream social being held on the campus quad next week.	• Thinking about how the document will be read will help you design and format it effectively. If the document is going to be referred to as a reference, making it easy to use is important.
What special characteristics do they have? • A special characteristic might mean that your audience members are all color blind or that they're all from a remote Pacific island. They could all be sixth-graders, or they could have all three of the above characteristics, in which case you'll have to accommodate this audience in your document to.	**Why is it needed?** • If this document isn't written, your reader may be at a loss when it comes to understanding a particular insight or idea. Your job here is to make sure you know what that insight is.	**Are there legal issues to consider?** • Think about what you're revealing to readers in the document you're writing and how you're revealing it. If you're passing along personal information about yourself or others, what legal recourse might there be on the part of your readers?
Which discourse community or communities do they belong to? • This question asks what groups your audience members belong to and how those memberships affect how they receive your message. Are they used to reading long paragraphs, or do they prefer short ones? How accustomed are they to the words you choose? Will they know what you're saying if you write *symbiosis*, or will you need to explain it?	**What will your readers do with this information?** • This can go beyond practical applications like how to properly change a car tire. Readers may be able to use the information you provide as a reason to take action or not to take action on a particular issue. They might use what you say to better understand a concept or idea. All of these purposes are useful.	**How much time do readers have to use the info you've given them?** • This may affect how you format the document, what points you emphasize, and how you emphasize them. If a reader has very little time to read through the information, then highlighting important points by using appropriate formatting becomes important.
What are their backgrounds and attitudes toward the subject? • This question is asking you to take into account what your readers may already know about your	**What, if any, membership do readers share in a group that expects certain ways of explaining ideas?**	**Are audience members from one culture only, or is this information directed at a cross-cultural audience?**

topic, or what opinions or perspectives they may already have regarding your topic.	• For example, people who read scientific articles and journals have fairly specific expectations of the literature they expect to find in those journals. If you don't meet those expectations with your writing, they won't be interested in what you say.	• In Japan, for instance, saying that something is going to be difficult may be read as a roundabout way of saying that it shouldn't happen or can't be done; however, to people in the United States, saying the same thing could only indicate the task will take a couple more minutes.

Think About It

- What different reasons do you have for writing?
- Who, specifically, are you writing to?
- Who will be using this writing, and where and when will they be using it?

By answering these questions and others like them, you'll be well on your way to successfully analyzing the audience you plan to address.

Audience Types

Say you're taking a sociology class from a professor at your college and write asking for a deadline extension. Because this professor is friendly enough in class, you write to her as though you were writing to one of your buddies back home. "Hey prof," you begin, "I'm outta twn Fri. & I need to turn my paper in on Mon." A day or two passes, and you don't get a response. What you've probably done is failed to recognize your audience, in this case your professor. She doesn't respond because she is put off by your lack of formality. Keeping your audience—the people receiving your message—in mind can give you some basic guidelines to avoid mistakes like this one. The basic audience types are:

- Academic Audience
- Formal Audience
- Informal Audience
- Hostile Audience
- Online Audience
- Creative Audience

While it's important to remember that these categories can and often do blend, knowing basic information about what each audience might expect from your writing will help you communicate more effectively.

Academic Audience

This audience includes people involved with or who make their career in higher education. These people are professors, department heads, teachers, deans, provosts, and regents. They may also be editors of academic publications. The following types of assignments generally target an academic audience:

- Lab reports
- Literary, television, or advertisement analysis essays
- Argumentative composition assignments
- Research essays

Academic audiences generally expect logical, linear writing that is clear and often thesis-driven. You may use data, statistics, factual evidence, personal experience, and other forms of evidence in your writing to sway these audience members.

Formal Audience

This audience is the mature, educated public that you might find at work or in formal civic situations. You'll be writing to a formal audience if you're writing to the following people:

- Colleagues inside your organization
- Your supervisors or other officials at your place of business
- Politicians
- Members of community organizations like neighborhood councils
- Administrators and teachers at your son or daughter's school
- Officers of the court or judicial system
- Lawyers, judges, or officers of the law

Like an academic audience, formal audiences expect clear, well-written prose in memos, emails, letters, and other communications.

Informal Audience

These are your peers, family, and friends. These people generally know you or have a good sense of who you are already. They don't expect overly formal communications; in fact, too much formality may offend them as they'll think you may be suddenly trying to keep them at a distance. You might be communicating with them in a personal email (one to a close friend or family member), in letters or on

postcards, in text messages, or through other forms of instant messaging.

Hostile Audience

A hostile audience doesn't agree with you on a particular point of contention. Keep in mind that a hostile audience could be considered informal, formal, academic, or online. You'll address a hostile audience in a way that is sensitive to their concerns and/or interests in your topic. You may be writing to a hostile audience if you're

- Writing to a political official who doesn't take the same stance you do on a particular issue
- Writing a newspaper or magazine opinion piece or writing a letter to the editor arguing against the stance taken in a previous article
- Writing an argumentative essay for a class in which you're asked to argue one side of a controversial issue

Above, the rhetorical situations mentioned involve you identifying specifically with the concerns and interests of your audience in order to allay, refute, or otherwise persuade these audience members toward your way of thinking. For more on how to write effective arguments, see Tools for Arguing and Writing an Argument Essay.

Online Audiences

Potential audience members in this category are limitless as over 3 billion people have access to the Internet. Keep in mind that the Internet is a very public place; thus, you will be likely to run into people with views and ideas far different from your own. However, the topic you're writing about will draw in individuals who are particularly interested in it, so imagine your audience as those interested in your topic and appeal to them. Some common ways to communicate online are as follows:

- Writing copy for special interest websites
- Writing a blog post on a topic
- Creating videos or using other forms of media (like a meme) related to a particular topic
- Writing a review of a product or service on a website

Instructors may ask you to imagine situations in which you're working to communicate with an audience in one of these ways, and, in doing so, they'll probably ask you to imagine your audience as a certain group of Internet users.

Creative Audiences

If your instructor asks you to develop creative content, you'll find that many of the conventions governing formal academic essays aren't applicable. Instead, these types of assignments might include the following varieties:

- Short stories or other fiction writing
- Creative essays or narrative-driven, non-fiction writing
- Poetry

Depending on what you're writing, you may use your creative license to include dialogue with profanity, slang, or sentence constructions that are inappropriate in other classes or even in other compositions for the same class. If you're writing poems, you'll be asked to focus on the sounds of words or on the images and feelings those words create in the minds of readers more so than you would if you were, say, writing a lab report for a science class. A lab report asks for objectivity, favoring prose written in passive voice: "A blue-green color was observed." Poets often favor the direct, subjective observation of a speaker: "The green current and the blue merged to dark cyan." For more on writing creatively, see Poetry, Short Fiction, and Writing a Narrative.

Think About It

- With all of these audiences in mind, which audience or audiences are you writing to?

- What are some ways you can begin tailoring your draft to fit the different needs of your specific audience?
- In what ways will these changes help you better reach your audience?

With these questions and the information above in mind, go back over your document and tailor it to better suit the audience you're addressing.

Recognizing and Overcoming Writer's Block

Chapter 2: Section 2, Lesson 1

Every writer has had that experience of sitting in front of the keyboard, ready to write, but the screen stares back—empty. For whatever reason, the words just won't come. No matter how simple the assignment may appear to be, the ideas just aren't there. Panic sets in.

Blanking out when faced with a writing assignment is a common form of writer's block: the inability to come up with ideas and/or translate them into a well-organized, well-developed piece of writing. Most writers, whether they're students in a freshman comp class or well-known authors, experience writer's block. Let's talk about some strategies you can use the next time this happens to you!

Writer's Block vs. Procrastination
The difference between writer's block and procrastination is a fine line. At some point, you may be faced with an assignment you just don't want to do. In the case of writer's block, however, it's more than just not wanting to do the project; rather, it's an inability to actually do it.

Procrastination may be a symptom of writer's block. If you find that you're putting off that essay because your mind freezes when you try to think about it, you may be experiencing some level of writer's block.

Levels of Writer's Block
There are a number of identifiable levels of writer's block:

- The temporary lapse block: the inability to capture the "right" words when needed
- The situational block: working under a deadline, conflicting obligations, social demands
- The emotional/cognitive block: related to emotional strain, cognitive inability to write, and/or language deficiency

Hurdling the Blocks
In order to get over writer's block, writers need to identify what's keeping them from writing.

- **The Temporary Lapse Block:** Temporary lapses include the inability to capture the right words. This block may be caused by a number of factors: (1) not having enough knowledge or background information about your subject, (2) unfamiliarity with the genre or type of writing, and (3) over-emphasizing the small things.

  Getting organized, gathering your resources, and conducting research before you start to write may help with this sort of writer's block. For example, when writing an argumentative essay, try writing your thesis before you start to construct the paper's body. This will help you articulate your argument and get your ideas going.

- **The Situational Blocks:** These blocks are related to working under a deadline, dealing with conflicting obligations, and working to meet social demands. Students in college often must deal with multiple important assignments due the same week or even the same day. Juggling these demands can cause stress. In addition, many college students balance not only school and social obligations, but also demands from family and outside employment.

  There are several ways to proactively manage this kind of block. First, give yourself enough time to meet deadlines. Many students find it helpful to put all their assignments on a calendar so they can plot out when each one is due. You can also set incremental milestones for outlines and drafts. Reward yourself with a small treat, such as a walk or a break with friends, to motivate you and keep you from this form of writer's block.

- **Emotional/Cognitive Blocks**: These blocks relate to emotional strain, the cognitive inability to write, and/or language deficiencies. They're often complex to deal with, but by taking one

step at a time, they can be overcome. Outside jobs, family members, and other issues in your personal life can create added stress. Some students also grapple with the fact that English is their second language, and words may not come as naturally as they do for native speakers.

While it may not be entirely possible, try to reduce stress when you're working on a tough project. Developing a healthy lifestyle that includes adequate sleep and exercise can help you manage these kinds of blocks. You may find that even with your best efforts, outside stressors make it difficult to write. Consider seeking guidance from a tutor or your instructor to help you get started. Finally, don't be afraid to ask for help, especially if it's needed with your language or writing abilities.

More Strategies for Dealing with Writer's Block
While writer's block can be frustrating, there are some ways to avoid experiencing it. Avoiding these negative strategies will help you focus on getting out of the block:

- Be kind to yourself and your writing—it's hard work! Remember that the best ways to get better at it are write, write, write, and read, read, read!
- Always listen to what people like and what they don't understand in your writing. These are cues that can help you use your strengths and strengthen your weaknesses.
- Write a little every day. The more you write, the easier it gets! In addition, you'll practice strategies that will help you avoid and overcome writer's block in the future.
- Set manageable goals. Keep in mind that writing is a craft and an art. These things require study and attention to technique and development of style. Evaluate where you are, and then figure out what you need to learn to get you to the next stage. One step at a time goes a long way.
- Stay open to many ideas. If you focus on one thing, you may shut out the millions of other possibilities. Look at your project from different perspectives. Try a different voice or format. Move to the next step and come back to the issue that's stopping you. Giving yourself the permission not to worry about it often opens up options you might not have considered.

Think About It

- When do you seem to experience writer's block?
- What does this say about what causes your writer's block?
- What suggestions from this reading do you think you can use the next time you experience writer's block?

Remember: Everyone experiences writer's block at some time. It's important to note when you think it most frequently happens to you so you can deal with its causes. Through perseverance and practice, you can overcome writer's block next time!

Using Invention Methods

Chapter 2: Section 2, Lesson 2

Most people know what it's like to feel out of their element, to be out of place or at a loss for words in an awkward situation. In those instances, sometimes the best option is to push aside the awkwardness and just jump right in. For instance, walk up to a group of people and say "Hi." Dance and have fun at a wedding. Go out with friends and suggest a new restaurant. What's the worst that could happen? More than likely, everyone will have a great time.

Writing is a little like that sometimes. It feels awkward because it makes you plunge into the unknown, especially if you have no idea what to write about. However, awkward moments can be productive moments. Using various invention methods can get you past the awkward stage and on to freely flowing ideas and strong writing.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming taps into aspects of creative thinking that writers too often push aside. It may feel natural to censor or edit as you write, but brainstorming relies on a different assumption—silly ideas often lead to good and interesting ideas.

The point of brainstorming is to generate as many creative ideas as possible in order to come away with one (or more) really useful idea in the end. Think fast and keep ideas short. You can always flesh out details later. Also, know that every idea is a good idea when you brainstorm, even those that might initially strike you as silly or outrageous. Withhold your judgment until later stages of the process. That way, you can focus on writing unfamiliar or new points—they are just what you want!

While there are various brainstorming techniques, they usually involve the same basic process: the use of *free association*, or the spontaneous flow of ideas. The trick is to let your thoughts run their own course in order to spark new and interesting ideas and images. You can brainstorm on your own or in a group. Here are a few possibilities:

Timed Brainstorming

- Open a new document (or get a blank sheet of paper).
- Set a time limit for how long you're going to brainstorm. If you're new to this, consider a fifteen-minute session. You might set a timer to go off after fifteen minutes or use a fifteen minute segment of music. When the music stops, you know the session is done.
- For the full fifteen minutes, write down ideas as they come to you. Don't censor, edit, or correct spelling. It doesn't matter what you write so much as that you write. Let your thoughts flow, and, as they flow, write them on that document or paper.
- If you reach the end of your set time and find that you're still on a roll, you can always continue. But, in general, you'll come to a point where stepping back and evaluating the ideas you've written seems right. (Remember: you can always begin another session when you're ready.)

Free Association

- Write down the basic issue or idea you want to address. For instance, you might start by paraphrasing the assignment or paper topic.
- Jot down thoughts quickly. Write down whatever comes to mind related to your assignment or topic. You do *not* need to use complete sentences to record your thoughts. The key is to come up with ideas and simply record them.
- Try different patterns for recording ideas. You might jot down ideas by beginning at the top and continuing down the page as thoughts come up. You could also begin in the middle and develop different clusters of associated ideas. Don't feel limited to words and phrases—use drawings or graphics if they help you develop and remember new ideas.

Evaluating and Sorting

After you've timed yourself or used free association, you'll want to take some time to sit back and review your ideas. You probably came up with some new and interesting options. Add some notations to these thoughts: circle or highlight points that seem worth keeping, cross out or delete ideas that seem like dead ends, draw lines between points that connect, move ideas around to see new juxtapositions and relationships among different points, and/or add new ideas as they occur to you.

Creating a Mind Map
When you *map* an essay plan, you use an invention method that lets you look at the relationships between the things you already know but haven't quite connected. You may not even know your exact topic when you start, but as you find connections, the topic will reveal itself. This method is great for narrative, descriptive, and definition assignments. One thing to have in mind is that there's no right or wrong way to create a map. It's a visual that really only needs to make sense to you.

For example, consider how you might map an extended definition essay of a concept. If the concept is "love," you could start in the center of a clean page by drawing a large circle. In the center, write the topic, *Love.* From there, fill up the circle with any number of concepts you can think of that are related to love, such as *feeling, action, relationship, emotion, gift, longing,* etc. Once the circle is full of concepts, try fitting them into categories. How many relate to feelings? How many talk about actions? How many focus on relationships? You might use three colors at this point, underlining or circling each concept based on its category—blue for feelings, red for actions, and green for relationships. Anything underlined in blue could become a paragraph on feelings. Likewise, those concepts underlined in red would help create a paragraph on actions, and those in green would meld into one on relationships. From there, feel free to keep going. The more details that emerge as the map expands, the more material you'll have for your paper. The goal for this essay is to identify an overarching definition based on all of these points. You could organize your definition of love as it pertains to each category or even to the three to four actions that people do to show love.

Clustering
Clustering is a way to organize ideas—first to find similarities and secondly to make connections. It's a way of working through ideas to categorize them. From there, you can step back and create a thesis. You can use clustering for any kind of essay, but it works very well with arguments.

For example, an instructor has asked for an argument paper on a local topic. You decide to write about supporting local farmers over big grocery stores. To invent by clustering, follow these steps:

- grab a blank sheet of paper or open a new document
- make a small circle in the middle and write "support local farmers" on it
- draw lines pointing outward from the circle—as many as you need for the ideas that come up
- at the ends of the lines, write reasons for supporting local farmers over shopping at grocery stores
- extend those reasons by adding details around them that will further support your argument
- use arrows to show which details connect back to the argument
- sort each reason based on those which include the strongest details with clear connections to the argument
- keep what's strong and clear and use it to begin to form an outline

Journaling
There is no one "right" way to keep a journal, so be sure to experiment a little to find the journaling technique that's most useful to you. The basic idea of journaling is to keep a regular record of your thoughts, reactions, and ideas so that you can use them when it's time to sit down and write an essay.

For example, you've been asked to write an essay about a book or movie. You're not sure how to get started, and you want to find a way to get your ideas down. Creating a journal entry will help. Your journal might consist of notes on a movie you saw last Saturday, such as plot points you want to remember, but you could also be more open, writing down emotional reactions to certain scenes. In this case, try splitting the pages in your journal into two columns, one for *Notes on the Movie* and another for *Thoughts on the Movie.* In the left column, write down all of the details from the movie that you could use as examples of support. In the right, jot down how you felt about each detail, whether it

was an example of a character's action, the cinematography, or the outcome.

When you finish, review your journal and begin putting an essay together. The *Notes* column will have quotations or references to important moments in the movie. The *Thoughts* column will help you understand your overall opinion of the movie and what you think the director was trying to accomplish.

If journaling sounds like it could be a useful strategy, try getting into the habit of writing daily. Keep notes on whatever you read, watch, or discuss for your class. The more you write, the easier it will be to keep writing when it's time to compose an essay!

Freewriting
Like journaling, freewriting is a way to get your ideas flowing without worrying about thesis, organization, tone, and so on. You'll be able to more easily access your best ideas *while* you're actually writing.

Freewriting is the process of **writing without stopping**. Don't stop to think of the right word. Don't stop to think of what you should say next. Just write and write and don't stop. Try to either fill a page or write for 5 minutes without picking up your pen or lifting your fingers from the keyboard. Of course, feel free to develop your own guidelines depending on what works best for you.

Much of what you write may be too random or freeform to include in an essay or writing project. Usually, though, writers will find that after they've spent part of the page (or a few minutes) writing down ideas and thoughts, they begin to get a better sense of where the writing can go, what ideas might be interesting to explore, and how those ideas could be communicated to an audience.

Consider this example of freewriting from a student who has to write a narrative essay about a significant experience from his past. He can't think of a strong topic, so he writes:

Okay here goes I don't really have any idea what I'm going to write about and in fact I'm not sure anything that significant ever happened to me anyway. When I was 2 I fell down the stairs and broke my arm, but I don't really remember that very well and I'm not sure how "significant" it was anyway. My parents moved to Colorado when I was 15, which I hated because I had to change high schools. I met Bernie there, who I'm not really in touch with that much anymore. We just started college, but he's in Minnesota and I'm still here in Denver. Bernie and I used to get into a lot of trouble together, but we had a lot of fun too. We email now and then, but it's not like seeing him all the time in the halls at high school. The guys in my dorm seem all right, but I can't tell yet if I'm really going to get along with any of them.

In this example, the student wrote without looking back; he didn't even stop to correct spelling mistakes. While he may not have any sentences that will make it into a final draft, he has come a long way toward finding a topic. Near the end of this short freewriting exercise, he is writing about the difficulty of making friends in college, and the significance of losing friends from high school. If he decides he doesn't want to write about this topic, he could try freewriting again to see if any other topics come to mind.

Think About It

- Which invention method will work best for your current assignment?
- Which invented ideas will have the strongest connections, details, or support?
- Which topic seems to be the one you'll have the most to write about?

Trying out and using the various invention methods described above can jumpstart just about any type of essay. Sitting down to write by inventing can make the writing process a lot more relaxed and creative. Have fun with it!

Choosing the Right Topic

Chapter 2: Section 2, Lesson 3

How do you feel when instructors say, *Write on a topic of your choice*? Maybe they give you some loose guidelines and a general area to focus on, but that's it. For some students, this is liberating! They can write about something that matters to them. No problem!

But for some students, the idea of having to narrow down to a specific topic can be very stressful. You want a good grade, but you don't want to choose something that's too difficult to write about—or too simple. On top of that, you want to choose a topic that you actually like and want to talk about. Hang in there! There are some strategies to help you.

Before You Select a Topic
First, look carefully at the information your instructor has provided. Even when the specific assignment is not defined, your assignment information is likely to help you get started:

Purpose
What is the purpose of your paper? Take a look at what your assignment is asking you to do. Look carefully at the description, often called the prompt. (See Analyzing the Prompt for more on this topic.) Does it ask you to describe, evaluate, analyze, argue, discuss, identify, define, compare/contrast, or explain? These words are clues as to how you approach your topic, and they help identify your overall purpose for writing.

For example, let's say you're supposed to write about something that has to do with the environment, and you've been told you need to *describe*. This paper will be very different than one whose purpose is to *argue*. A descriptive paper might simply set out the sights, sounds, and smells of a city's pollution problem; an argument essay on the same general topic might press for more public transportation as a means of reducing pollution.

So, look for those key, instructive words in your assignment. If they are not there, and you're not sure what your purpose is, ask your instructor to provide more information.

Audience
You'll also need to think about your audience. Does your assignment sheet indicate a particular audience, such as your fellow classmates, readers of the local newspaper, or a state representative? If your assignment doesn't specify your audience (sometimes it won't), you have to figure out *who* you are writing for based on components of the assignment.

For example, if you're writing an argumentative essay about your solution to an on-campus parking problem, you may want to tailor your writing to administrators who make decisions about parking. Or you may want to convince fellow students to campaign for this solution in order to initiate change in the current parking situation. Knowing who your audience is can really help you narrow your focus. (See Analyzing Your Audience and Audience Types for more about writing for a particular audience.)

Narrow Versus Broad
Next, you need to decide if your idea for a topic is too broad or too narrow for the assignment specifications. Let's say you have to write a 2-3-page informative essay. You decide to write an essay on *dog training.*

Because this explanation is such a *broad* topic, you would not be able to cover the material adequately in 2-3 pages. (Entire books are written on this topic.) Likewise, if you choose to write only about a single part of one training system, you may not have enough material to talk about in 2-3 pages because your topic is too *narrow*.

To make this fit the assignment specifications, you might, however, consider developing a discussion on *one* training method, its history, what critics have to say, and how it works.

Moving from General Topic to Specific Focus
Once you've carefully studied the assignment and understand the basic guidelines, you'll need to find a way to move from general topic ideas to a specific focus.

Interest
Start by finding a topic that interests you but also falls into the expectations for the assignment. There's a lot of information on genetically modified foods, for example. How much does that topic interest you, though? How much do you care about it? If you choose something that interests you, you'll most likely write a better paper because you actually care about the topic.

Research
If you only have a general assignment, one way to narrow it down is to research and learn more about the general topic. You can use both the Internet and the library in order to find out more about your topic and narrow your field. You can also discuss your general topic with other people in order to discover new ideas and to think about it in a way that you might not have considered. For more information about research, check out Completing the Research Process, Using the Library Wisely, Conducting Field Research, and Using the Internet Wisely.

Let's say your instructor has told you to write anything as long as it's descriptive and has to do with architecture. You don't know much about architecture, but you know you usually like modern things. You do a search for "modern architecture." You see something about the architect Frank Lloyd Wright that interests you, and then you see a photograph of a house he designed.

Since you know that you're supposed to describe, and now you know you're going to be writing about Frank Lloyd Wright, you might want to look for one of Wright's designs or houses that you could describe. You could ask your librarian for help in finding books or magazines about Wright. In this way, research can help you get a better idea of the general field you will be working in and lead you to a specific topic.

Brainstorming
You can use brainstorming in order to help you narrow your topic and find a focus. This technique works particularly well when you're writing an essay that's based on your own experience. Brainstorming is an "invention method"; when you brainstorm, you use your imagination and think freely in order to generate ideas.

Let's say your instructor has asked you to write about a "memorable experience." Your first thought is *I have some experiences that seem big to me, but I don't know if they're that important or memorable. How do I know what's memorable or not?*

Give yourself ten minutes to brainstorm. Start with a blank document and put your general topic at the top of the page. Then, *without censoring yourself* (don't worry about what's right or wrong or seems silly), list every experience that comes to mind. Once you've run out of steam, look back at your list and choose the memory that stands out to you.

Then, begin brainstorming again—this time with just that memory at the top of your page. The memory can become the topic, and the details on your second list can become some of the points you introduce or use in your essay. To consider more ways to brainstorm, see Using Invention Methods.

Think About it

- What do you really want to discuss? What are you passionate about?
- What is your purpose for writing? What do you have to do?
- Who is your intended audience?
- What is the scope of your essay?
- How can you refine your focus?

Once you have the answers to these questions, you'll be on your way to choosing the right topic!

Completing the Research Process

Chapter 2: Section 3, Lesson 1

Do you freeze up when you're assigned a research paper? Have you ever avoided taking a class because it required a huge research project? What is academic research anyway? Chances are, you've done plenty of real-life research—probably more than you realize—even if you didn't think of it in those terms.

Defining Research
In a nutshell, research is a search for answers. You do research all the time. Let's say you want to go out on Saturday and make a good impression with some old friends. You decide to go to a casual restaurant in a medium price range. How do you make that choice? You want great food, good service, and an informal atmosphere. First, you ask three different friends what restaurant they would recommend given your target description. You might also check Yelp or Urbanspoon to see if something looks interesting nearby. Perhaps you'll look online to check out a couple of different restaurants' menus and prices once you've narrowed it down. With all this information, you make a decision and call in a reservation. You've just completed a research project! Here's what happened:

- First, as in all research, you found an interesting problem that needed an answer. The question was *Where do I take my old friends?*
- Next, you sought out information about the problem and gathered data. The data came from three different sources: friends, apps, and the restaurants' websites.
- Then, you worked to analyze or evaluate the data. Information alone didn't answer your question; you analyzed and evaluated before reaching a conclusion.
- Lastly, you drew a conclusion and acted on that conclusion. In this case, you made a reservation at the restaurant best meeting the criteria for your Saturday night.

Research includes *all* of these elements with a particular purpose in mind: asking the question, gathering the data, analyzing and evaluating the data, and reaching a conclusion.

Two Kinds of Research: Nonacademic and Academic Research
As with any kind of writing, research writing must begin with audience and purpose analysis. Different situations and environments require different approaches to the problem. For students, there are generally only two primary areas of research: nonacademic and academic.

Nonacademic Research
Most everyday research is nonacademic, and, typically, this research is more informal and less rigidly structured. The audience in nonacademic research can be anyone (For more information about audience, see Analyzing Your Audience and Audience Types). You might do personal research when you buy a new car, or you might do research for your boss when you put together a needs analysis for the training of new hires. Finding a restaurant (as above) is another example. Each circumstance has a different audience, and the type, extent, and final presentation of the research will change with each audience.

With nonacademic research, the basic process is the same: Define the problem, gather the data, analyze that data, and reach a conclusion. When writing for nonacademic purposes, you might not take careful notes to accurately credit the sources, and you might not be asked to write a report. You've still done research, but your approach and the end product will be more informal.

Academic Research
Academic research has the same components as nonacademic research, but it requires specific conventions and a higher degree of formality. Follow these steps to complete the academic research process:

Step 1: Define the Problem
In academic research, you'll construct research questions. What do you want to know? Why do you want to know it? Those questions will guide the research and eventually lead to the thesis. When

deciding just what the topic will be, remember that you're doing research, not just reporting. That means thinking in terms of opinions and answers rather than just information. Consider this sample research question for an academic paper: *Do writers with a southern heritage have the same viewpoint of the battle of Gettysburg as writers with a northern heritage?* This kind of specific question helps to formalize your approach to the research, and it can form the basis of your thesis statement.

Step 2: Gather Data

You can find information (data) from either primary sources (information about your topic that hasn't been evaluated by someone else—like a Walt Whitman poem or a study of dreams by Sigmund Freud) or secondary sources (what someone else has said about the topic). While it's generally best to use primary sources, secondary sources are often more readily available. Books and articles from the library are helpful, but remember to look for other sources as well. Perhaps you could interview someone who has knowledge about the topic, or you might conduct a survey. The data you gather will provide the best answer to your research question.

For example, for the research question on writers with a southern heritage, you could first do some preliminary research to see which Civil War authors have a known southern heritage and which ones have a known northern heritage. You could then look for an account of the Battle of Gettysburg written by authors from those two different heritages. While you're looking, you might see if anyone has written anything about Civil War history writers and the impact geographical heritage has on their writing. At this point, you would have both primary sources (the actual accounts from the authors) and secondary sources (what others have said about the topic). If you happen to know an authority in Civil War history, you might interview him or her to get another point of view. The interviewee would be another secondary source if a scholar on the topic and a primary source if an author. Since this research is for a class, take very careful notes about what information came from which source so as to give credit to those sources when you write the final paper.

Step 3: Analyze and Evaluate the Data

Once you've gathered information, analyze and evaluate it. You've read the authors as well as commentators. Your opinion will be based on all of that information as it applies to the research question. Remember to avoid merely summarizing that information. Many novice researchers think they must agree with what the experts say about a topic, but that's not the case. Part of the job as a researcher is to decide if you agree and why (or not!); take care to support your opinions with careful research.

Step 4: Draw Conclusions

After you have analyzed and evaluated the gathered information, draw conclusions. You may not decide that there's a difference in how the battle is viewed based on the author's geographical heritage. You may even decide that you don't know enough to reach a decision!

Step 5: Report Your Findings

In academic research, you draw conclusions and also tell people what you discovered in that research, usually through a formal paper.

That paper will follow a particular format and style depending on the discipline and instructor. The important thing to remember is to follow all of the conventions as set forth in the style guide you use. As a writer, it's your responsibility to tell the readers what information is from which source, using in-text citations to uphold your academic integrity and build reader credibility. The paper will also need a bibliography page including a list of sources used in your research. For more information on in-text citations and your bibliography page, see [MLA Style](), [APA Style]() or [Chicago/Turabian Style]() documentation.

Think About It

- What research question will keep you and your reader interested?
- What types of research can you use—academic, nonacademic, or both?

- Which conclusions best answer your research question?

In both nonacademic and academic research, you must decide upon the question, gather data, analyze and evaluate the data, and draw conclusions. How you share those conclusions will be the difference between nonacademic or academic research.

Reading Critically to Gather Information

Chapter 2: Section 3, Lesson 2

Just as people write for various purposes, they also read for various purposes: entertainment, information, understanding, and more. When reading for fun, you simply let the story or book take you into its world and enjoy it for the time you're there. However, when reading for information or understanding, you filter the information and make judgments about its truthfulness or personal significance. Reading for enjoyment is important, but so is reading critically.

Critical Reading: A Definition and Rationale

Reading critically means moving from simply "taking in" what you read to "talking back" to what you read and, ultimately, "taking a stand" on the issues you read about and find important. Critical reading refers to the process of making judgments and filtering material in effective, useful ways. Critical reading means you're aware that what you read is the result of one person's (or group's) view of the subject, and that person or group made choices about what he or she said and how he or she said it.

Critical reading also means going through the steps necessary to make an informed judgment:

- Understand what the writer is saying
- Ask good questions of the text, recognizing what the writer is doing and saying
- Decide what you think about the text

Step 1: Understand What the Writer is Saying

To make any judgment about what you're reading, you must first be sure you know what the author is saying. Understanding what someone else says not only makes it possible to form a good judgment about it but doing so also builds readers' belief in what you say.

More than likely, you're already familiar with reading-for-information since it's the kind of reading often required by textbooks and introductory classes in the natural and social sciences, history, and so on; it's also the kind of reading you do often every day, such as following instructions or reading about news events. You don't ask *why* very often in these circumstances; you simply take in information. Thus, the first step in critical reading is asking *who*, *what, when*, and *where* before asking *why* and *how*. These strategies will help decipher what you read:

Skim the Text

While skimming, pay attention to the following aspects:

- The language level: If the writing is difficult to read, have a dictionary handy
- The overall organization and headings: They indicate what's covered in each section
- The introduction and conclusion: They are most often where main points are summarized

Use a Pencil

A pencil is useful to mark significant statements, point out where the writer is changing topics, or note meanings of difficult words. If you're reading in an electronic format, use the "notes" or "highlight" feature or take notes on your phone about page numbers, passages, lines, or words that stand out.

Skim Again

When you go back through the document, notice where information was unclear or complex, paying attention to the overall organization and main points. Then, make any additional notes that strike you as you skim a second time. Reread parts that may have been confusing the first time; since a writer often re-explains points later in the text, you may understand something that was initially unclear once you see what else the writer has to say.

Step 2: Make Smart Choices

Not everything in print is true or presents the whole story. From your own experience, you may note that writing is a process loaded with choices: what to say, what not to say, how to say it, how not to

say it, to whom to say it, and for what purpose. All of these choices influence what you read; the more aware you are of the writer's choices, the better you will read and analyze the text.

Reading
Besides preparing to understand the text you read, you can also ask some questions to help clarify the motives and possible biases of the writer(s).

- Look for information about the writer. Often there will a biographical note that can give you clues to the writer's expertise and attitudes. When was the text written? What was going on in the world? What triggered the writer to write this text? Who was the intended reader?
- When you skim the introduction and conclusion, write down the writer's main point and any major points that support that point. As you read, ask yourself if the writer is supporting that point well or if he or she is leaving out some important information.
- Write down some initial thoughts you have about the topic of the text: What do you already know? What is your initial position on the topic? What do you need to know?
- Note the points with which you agree/disagree throughout: What points are weak? Which are strong? What evidence allows you to believe what the writer says? What is your emotional reaction to the writing?

Analysis
In addition to simply noting what you think or what you observe, ask questions about why you understand the text as you do or why the writer chose to write it in a particular way. Consider questions such as

- What is the writer's purpose, stated or unstated?
- How does the writer identify the sources, and are they strong? (See Evaluating Sources.)
- What larger political, social, or economic circumstances may have influenced the writer?
- How does that experience or outlook affect your agreement or disagreement with the author?
- What information has the writer failed to fully explain, or what has the writer left out about important issues?
- Why does the author's perspective seem persuasive (or not)?

These steps will take you from being simply a spectator to a participant in the reading, which will give you more control over how a text affects you and will let you "talk back" to the author. You'll take an active role in the conversations of your profession and society. Then, you can move on to the next step, deciding what you think and either write or talk about it.

Step 3: Decide What You Think
After determining what the writer is saying, and after reading and analyzing the material, you can decide what you think. Which authors do you agree with and why? Whom do you disagree with and why? At this stage, you get to draw conclusions and discuss them. What material from the text led to your conclusions? In essence, you'll "take a stand" about what each writer is saying and why. You might express your stance in writing, in a speech, or in casual conversation.

Think About It

- Who wrote the text you're reading, and what may have influenced the writing?
- What are the author's main ideas, and how well are they supported throughout the text?
- What stance should you take to enter into the conversation about your topic?

Reading critically means understanding a text, making judgments about what's being said, and deciding what you think; in other words, talking back so as to enter into the conversation—through either a written or spoken format—in a confident, informed way.

Using the Internet Wisely

Chapter 2: Section 3, Lesson 3

If you've grown up using the Internet, you may not realize how much it's changed over the last ten or fifteen years. In spite of the changes, basic search principles remain much the same. For a discussion of purely academic online resources, like academic databases and library catalogues, see [Using the Library Wisely](). See below for more general methods to search the Internet.

Internet Resources
Apps
If you have a tablet or a smartphone, you'll likely be able to access apps that can help with your search. Some apps offer educational resources and detailed information about a given topic or specialty. For example, an app might act as a well-researched handbook, a technical manual on a specialized topic, a collection of academic articles, or an encyclopedia on a specific topic. Some apps allow you to search a given resource or database on the go, such as a library's catalog or a newspaper's databases. Other apps offer regularly docs issues of newspapers, magazines, journals, and blogs.

E-Books
You can find a lot of contemporary e-books, as well as e-books of literature and many other types of writing, on devices such as the Kindle. Often, the book will only be readable on a particular type of e-reader, but you can sometimes find e-books in different formats, such as PDF, Word, or HTML, that can be read on multiple devices. Some current academic e-books are offered for free on academic websites, organizational websites, or as part of an open-publishing arrangement. Classical books that are out of copyright, such as Darwin's essays or Shakespeare's plays, are also available for free through online archives. Check the e-books carefully, though; many print texts are converted to e-books using optical character recognition (OCR) software rather than by hand. Those texts may not have been proofread well and could have many typos and errors; even professionally published e-books may have lingering formatting and layout issues that make the text more difficult to decipher.

Online News Sources, Magazines, and Journals
Newspapers like *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and even your local paper are on the web, often without a subscription fee. Magazines geared to the general public (like *Time Magazine*) and journals directed to professionals (like *The New England Journal of Medicine*) are available for free, too. Newspapers have started to make back issues available online as well, so it's now possible to search *The New York Times* website for articles published decades and even centuries before the Internet was accessible. Many of these articles are freely available while others are available for a nominal fee. Now, you don't always have to go to a library's microfiche room to find newspaper articles from prior decades. First, check the publication's website.

Government and Institutional Websites
Governments, research institutions, and non-profits often provide a wealth of resources, articles, and studies that they have authored, have conducted, or are associated with. Some non-profit groups, such as those whose mission is to search for missing children or those that discuss health issues like arthritis, have websites, as do specific government departments, research organizations, and political action groups. While the sources are easy to access, you'll want to check their credibility carefully. For example, research published by a think tank with a clearly-defined political position will be less credible than an article in a peer-reviewed academic journal. That doesn't mean that such sources are useless. They might well contain valuable and relevant information; with any source, you should carefully consider its credibility in relation to its topic.

Individual and Corporate Websites
You can access individual people's homepages or web pages created for their personal use, but read those pages with a grain of salt. While they may have some useful information, the pages may not have reliable sources, and they may be very biased. Corporations also make research and information available on their websites. Consider the source of information, and be just as skeptical about it as you

are with research provided by a political think tank.

Social Media
Social media is becoming an increasingly popular form of research as more and more academic institutions, organizations, and researchers operate social media accounts. You might find Twitter links to a new article on bat population decline, or question-and-answer sessions in the comments section of a blog. You might find a Facebook group dedicated to sharing information and articles about a current literary movement. These are all forms of *secondary research*, but social media can also be a great medium for *primary research*, whether you're conducting a survey or simply observing public discussions about an issue. (See [Completing the Research Process](#) for more on primary and secondary research.) Most documentation styles, such as APA, also have guidelines for citing social media, so consider it a valid resource in your online search.

Finding Your Information
It's important to note that the Internet offers many different search interfaces and search resources beyond traditional search engines. Newspapers, databases, apps, catalogs, and social media services all offer search functions, each with different options, capabilities, strengths, and weaknesses. Get to know the resource's search functions and capabilities before you begin to maximize your search efforts.

Many of these resources, like traditional search engines, make use of Boolean terms. These are unique terms that you can use in the search field to expand, narrow, or otherwise adjust your results. A resource such as a library catalog might use drop-down menus that allow you to apply Boolean terms while another resource such as Google might require that you type the Boolean terms into the search field. You might want to use the following Boolean terms to expand and narrow your search:

- *AND* between keywords lets you find sources that include two specific words (e.g., multiple *AND* intelligences). *AND* narrows your search. In some search engines, the *AND* is represented by a plus (+).
- *NOT* also narrows your search. For example, "orioles *NOT* baseball" will narrow your search to orioles as birds or some other uses of the word. In some search engines, the *NOT* is represented by a minus (-).
- *OR* between keywords will expand the search. *OR* tells the search engine to find sources that include either one of two words, sometimes synonyms (e.g., students *OR* youth).
- Wildcard characters like * and ? let you shorten a term while broadening the search (e.g., if you type writ* as your keyword, you can get results for writer, writers, and writing).

If you combine these terms, your searches can become even more precise. For more information about keyword searches, email or visit your librarian or use your library's "Live Chat" service, if available.

Think About It

- What information do you need to find, and what online sources are likely to provide it?
- Which sources can you use as part of the open Internet?
- How can you use Boolean terms to make your search more effective?

When using the Internet for research, you should consider not only what topic you need to research but also the various types of sources—like websites, e-books, or apps—that might provide the information you need.

Using the Library Wisely

Chapter 2: Section 3, Lesson 4

An essential part of your college education is learning how to find the information you need to understand the subjects you're learning about and to find support for your writing. On any campus, the first place to begin looking for information is the college or university library. With so many resources available, it's helpful to think about how you as a student actually access these resources. The library's functions and access points are as important as the resources it has available.

Contacting Your Librarian

If you need to contact a librarian with a question about a source or resource, you probably don't have to visit the library. Many libraries publish staff directories on their websites with email addresses that you can use to quickly contact a relevant department or specialist. Some libraries provide one email address through which all queries can be directed. Other libraries offer a "Live Chat" function on their websites, where you can chat with a librarian rather than waiting for an email response. Of course, if you're able to visit the library in person, you can always visit the Circulation Desk, where you can check out physical books and other materials, find items that the instructor has put on reserve, and go for answers to general questions about the library and its services. Many libraries also offer self-checkout desks where you can use your library card to checkout items without needing a librarian, so look for those as well.

Using Your Library's Portal

If your school has a physical library, you should be able to access the library's holdings, known as its catalogue. While you'll usually need to visit the library to pick up a physical item, finding out about items in the library's catalogue is often easier done using a computer. The library catalogue is the heart of most libraries—it's the catalogue of most of the library's holdings plus the holdings of local libraries or libraries in a consortium. A consortium of libraries often includes all of the branch campuses of a university and/or local colleges who have agreed that their library resources can be borrowed among all of the consortium's students. The easiest way to access this catalogue is usually through the website or portal of your library, which you can do from any computer, including your home computer. From the consortium's portal, you can usually place a hold on an item or request that an item be sent from one library to another in the consortium so that you can pick it up. If a book is not available from a library in the consortium, you can often request an interlibrary loan, which allows the item to be delivered from another library or consortium in another area or even another state.

Some libraries also offer tablet or smartphone apps that allow you to search the catalogue and manage your library account. From the library's website portal or app, you can place a hold on an item so that the library will reserve it for you. You can often request that certain items be transferred from other libraries in the consortium to your own library. You can check due dates for your items and renew items as well. Managing your library account requires a login and password, and you'll need to contact the library if you don't already have these credentials.

Using a Database

The vast majority of libraries now use computer databases to access their periodical indexes, such as JSTOR, EBSCO, and Pro-Quest, and you can often access your library's database subscriptions from any computer. *Periodical* is the generic name for anything that's published periodically (daily, weekly, monthly, and so on). Periodicals include such things as newspapers and scholarly journals. A periodical index is a listing by subject of the articles from a variety of journals, newspapers, and magazines. You can often search by key word, journal title, author, and more. Some databases focus specifically on key fields of study. For example, the database ERIC offers education-related resources, whereas JSTOR is well known for its listings of humanities journals, and LexisNexis is reputed for its legal articles and resources.

Using the Stacks

If you live close to the library and you know that the print item you want is there, such as a book of essays, a monograph, or a report, it's usually fastest to find the item on the shelf yourself and check it out. These shelves of books are called "the stacks." The stacks contain the library's most precious resources: tens of thousands of books and print copies of periodicals to check out for your research.

Once you've found some potential sources, you'll need to locate and retrieve them by using the "call number" from the catalogue. If you're looking for a periodical or a journal, those may be in a different location from the books. The most recent journals are likely to be located together in one place, and the older, bound journals will be in another location. The library binds journals into a book, usually by year. Ask for help if you have trouble finding something. Often, there are also individual desks for quiet study called "study carrels" in the stacks, so you can sit and skim through your selections before checking them out from the library. More and more, libraries are also integrating open-concept study areas. These are often large rooms with wide tables and lots of light, where you can study in a group or work on a project with others. You're free to review library materials there as well if you don't want to check them out. Also, usually you're not expected to re-shelve the books that you take and then decide not to check out. Trained library employees re-shelve books so that they're always where they need to be for the next researcher. Watch for marked tables where you can leave books to be re-shelved.

Using Your Library's References Section
The reference area contains general reference tools of many different kinds. Go here if you want to use an unabridged dictionary or a specialized dictionary, find an atlas or an almanac, look for biographical information about someone, find general information about a company, or talk to a Reference Librarian. Most of the sources in the reference area can't be checked out of the library, but it's a great place to find that little bit of factual information you need for a report or term paper.

Think About It

- What kind of services do you need to access at the library for your research?
- What are you looking for, and whom, if anyone, do you need to contact at the library in order to find it?
- If you can't visit the library in person, where can you access the services remotely, online?

Libraries may seem obsolete to some people, but they continue to provide essential research services, many of which can be accessed electronically.

Conducting Field Research

Chapter 2: Section 3, Lesson 5

Research is a big part of many writing assignments, but it can be intimidating if you don't know where to begin. There are many different field research approaches, including surveys, questionnaires, interviews, and observations. There is also the choice of quantitative and qualitative research and the question of how to conduct research to find the information you need. Let's take a look at how you can get started!

Choosing the Right Kind of Research

When you want information that hasn't been analyzed or interpreted by someone else, think about doing your own research. This kind of research frequently is called "field research" because much of it is conducted "in the field" or in the subject's natural environment. For example, if you interview shoppers in your local mall, you're conducting field research.

The research you conduct in the field will be either quantitative research or qualitative research. *Quantitative* research seeks numerical data and uses tools (instruments) like surveys and questionnaires to gather the data. *Qualitative* research examines how people or animals (or other things) act and react under natural and experimental conditions; it often uses interviews and observations.

Most researchers agree that you can pull valid data from either a qualitative or a quantitative study if you've followed sound principles in designing it. You will choose your methodology (qualitative or quantitative) based on what you're studying and what you hope to discover, not on whether you like to work with words or with numbers.

The Most Common Tools

There are a number of different ways to collect data when doing field research. The three most common data gathering instruments are the *survey* or *questionnaire,* the *interview,* and the *observation*. As a researcher, you decide what method will give you the best data to answer your question. Once you've decided on the approach, you'll need to do some reading to find out just how to go about designing a survey or conducting an interview or observation.

Individual Research Steps
Step 1: Define Your Problem and Design Your Research Questions

What are you researching? What questions do you hope to answer through your research? These questions will determine what kind of research you do because different kinds of research yield different kinds of data.

For example, Aleasha is trying to decide between two majors: history and psychology. She's interested in both, but she's concerned about getting a job after college. To find out more, she decides to contact some past graduates of both degrees at her college. She decides that she wants to answer the following primary questions:

- How many of the graduates were able to find work in their field?
- How satisfying do they find their work?

These two major concerns form her research questions. She'll need answers to both of these questions to make a decision.

Step 2: Decide What Kind of Data You Need and How You'll Collect It

Data form the substance of any research project, no matter how small. As the researcher, it's up to Aleasha to decide what kind of information she needs to answer her research questions and how she'll be able to get that information.

- ***The quantitative approach:*** To answer her first question, Aleasha will need some hard

numbers on how many people find jobs in each major. This kind of "numbers" question lends itself to quantitative research.

- **The qualitative approach:** The second question will need more detailed information made up of experiences and opinions. This sort of questioning will lead to a qualitative approach.

At this point, Aleasha needs to find answers to both major questions, so she'll need to use quantitative *and* qualitative research. She can start with a list of graduates from the last three years in each department. After sending out many emails, she receives responses from twenty different graduates in each program who are willing to answer questions.

Since this number is fairly small, she decides to question all forty people. If she were working with a larger pool, she might have narrowed her search to a *sample*, or smaller portion. She might have chosen respondents who are most representative of the range of graduates from her school, or she might have picked certain categories, depending on what she wanted to know.

Step 3: Gather Your Data
The data you seek determines how you choose to gather the data. Aleasha decides that she needs a survey and an interview, so she'll need to develop questions for each.

- **The quantitative approach:** Aleasha develops a survey that she can give the graduates to find out how many of them are working in the field they studied. She sends out a survey with a series of questions about what work the respondent is doing, how long it took to find that position, and other, similar questions.
- **The qualitative approach:** She also wants to learn about job satisfaction. This means she'll send more in-depth interview questions to the respondents who did find work in their chosen field. She asks
    - o What do you find most rewarding about your work?
    - o What do you find least enjoyable?
    - o What surprises did you encounter when you moved from a student in this field to someone actively working in it?
    - o How satisfied do you feel with your work?

Combining these two approaches will give Aleasha the data she needs to make an informed choice.

Step 4: Analyze the Data
After collecting the data, Aleasha needs to analyze it so she can answer her original questions in a meaningful, comprehensible way.

- **The quantitative approach:** Aleasha will need to figure out what the responses to the survey mean. This will involve doing some simple statistical math to determine what percentage of graduates were able to find work in their chosen field and how long, on average, it took them to find work.
- **The qualitative approach:** Reviewing the interviews, Aleasha might ask herself some of the following questions:
    - o What similar words do people use to describe a particular experience at work?
    - o How does one group of people (men, for example) describe an experience differently than another group (women, for example)?
    - o Which questions did graduates answered in an overwhelmingly similar manner?

Processing qualitative data is much messier than processing statistical data because there isn't a prescribed series of actions that will give you a set answer. There are, however, very definite steps you should take to verify your data, and if you're doing a qualitative study, do some reading about data analysis before you start your project.

Step 5: Report the Data
Aleasha started this research for personal reasons, but she's become so interested in the process that

she wants to write it up and submit it to the student research periodical at her school. She'll need to report her findings in a format that her readers can understand and that fulfills the style requirements of the periodical. In much the same way, your own research will need to abide by your instructor's guidelines. Consider what Aleasha did:

- **The quantitative approach:** If Aleasha focuses on the data from her survey, she'd use a very formal, scientific writing style. She'd use third person pronouns to discuss the research and include charts or tables to illustrate her findings. Depending on the requirements of the periodical, she may or may not have the standard five-section research report organization (e.g., introduction/problem description, literature review, methodology, data analysis, conclusions).
- **The qualitative approach:** If she focuses on only the interview questions, her report could either resemble the quantitative approach above or something less formal. Since her goal is to understand the experiences of graduates working in the two fields, she might use a somewhat more narrative style to discuss her results. Therefore, her writing could use "I" (the first person) and a less formal structure.

Think About It

- What problem or question are you researching?
- What approach do you need—qualitative, quantitative, or both?
- What tools will work best to collect the data?
- How should you analyze the data?
- How can you present your findings most effectively?

Knowing what answers you're looking for is the first step in developing a research plan. From there, you can develop a wide variety of techniques for gathering, analyzing, and presenting your findings.

Conducting Interviews

Chapter 2: Section 3, Lesson 6

Preparing for an interview can be a bit daunting because it's somewhat unfamiliar. So much of academic work happens with just you and your computer, so conducting an interview requires a whole new set of skills. Good interviews can provide great insights and unique information about a topic, but they also require careful planning and execution. Let's look at some of the most important parts of using interviews in academic research.

Planning an Interview
Due Diligence or Pre-Research
A good interview is based on due diligence, or proper background research. The people you interview expect you to know a little about your subject, so do some preliminary research to help form effective, meaningful questions and to avoid wasting interview time on information you could find elsewhere. Research the person you're interviewing, too; knowing your interviewee in advance saves time and helps create a more prepared, professional atmosphere.

Prepare a Narrative or Script
Scripting or writing out your interview plans is helpful because it 1) prevents you from freezing if you become stressed, 2) keeps you on topic, 3) ensures you cover all the questions you want to ask, and 4) gives you the opportunity to e-mail your questions to the interviewee for answers.

Schedule an interview in advance rather than hoping to "drop in" or catch someone. If you're calling for an interview appointment, consider creating a script for the initial request. Being prepared and confident might help you land the initial interview. Once you land the interview, your opening script might look like this:

Hello! My name is Gracie Canus. I'm a student at Briceton College, working on a paper about local recycling programs, and I hope you could help me. Do you have time for a few questions?

In your interview script, include a question to confirm the proper spelling of your interviewee's name, his or her proper title, and the best contact information for follow-up questions. Include a final question like *What information do you feel is important to this topic that we haven't covered yet?* to give the interviewee an opportunity to add a few closing comments.

Develop Open-Ended Questions
It's important to use open-ended questions in interviews to help the interviewee start talking and explaining. An open-ended question is one that cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no." To ask open-ended questions, begin with the questions journalists use: *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *why*, and *how*:

- *How do you feel about ongoing debate about the new recycling laws for our county?*
- *What is the overall response you've seen to similar recycling programs?*
- *Why do you think people are responding so strongly to this issue?*

Conducting the Interview
Interviewing by e-mail is quite simple. Communicate over e-mail, send the questions, receive the answers, and, if necessary, follow up to clear up any confusion.

Unlike e-mail, conducting an interview over the phone or in-person requires a way to record a session. Using a high-quality digital or tape recorder is ideal so you can replay the interview as often as you need. However, since it's illegal to record a conversation without prior consent in many areas, you'll want to get (and record!) permission to do so from the interviewee.

Taking notes is the most common way of recording interviews, even if you're using another device as well. Even with practice, you may have to ask the interviewee to slow down or pause a moment; most interviewees are very accommodating with these requests because they prefer the notes and report

be accurate.

After the interview, always thank your interviewee for his or her time.

Verify Your Interview Information
Type a transcript of the interview as soon as possible to be sure your notes and memory are correct. Offer to send the interviewee a copy of the transcript so that she or he can make any changes or clarifications.

Build a Positive Relationship Through the Interview
Creating a positive relationship with the interviewee can lead to a more successful session now and in the future. Here are a few strategies that can help:

- Start with an open mind; be willing to listen to the interviewee's opinions about the topic. After all, his or her opinion and perspective are necessary to provide a balanced and informed account, especially if your own views on the subject matter differ.
- Do not go into an interview hoping to change the interviewee's beliefs. At best, your interviewee will shut down and give you very little helpful information. At worst, you could offend your interviewee and create a negative relationship that may last long-term. Being respectful of the other person's viewpoint is an absolute must in an interview.
- Avoid expressing doubts personally. For instance, instead of saying *This new recycling program costs more money than it's worth to the environment,* the interviewer might say, *Councilman Mark Jones said that this new recycling program costs more money than it is worth to the environment. What is your response to that?* By voicing a third party's concerns, you avoid becoming antagonistic yourself.
- In both the transcript and the report, be true to the interviewee's intent. Avoid misrepresenting, modifying, or taking quotes out of context. Always ask yourself if you're presenting an honest, accurate, and fair depiction of what your subject said.

Positive E-mail Interviews
Proofread your e-mails and maintain a professional writing voice, avoiding text- or chat-speak, as in the following example:

Dear Dr. Newton:

Thank you for taking the time to look at my questions. I've attached them in a Word document. Please let me know if you have trouble opening them or if you have any questions for me.

My due date for this piece is Friday, May 8th. If possible, please respond by Friday, May 1st so that I have time to compile your responses and ask any follow-up questions. I look forward to your insight.

Thank you very much for your time and assistance.

Sincerely,
Gracie Canus

As Gracie did above, announce the project's due date and the expected return date of the survey so that the interview subject is aware of the time frame. If the interviewee does not respond in 2-3 days, it's appropriate to e-mail again, asking if he or she received your last email and requesting a response.

Positive Phone Interview
When setting up a phone interview, follow up in 2-3 days if you have not heard from your interviewee. Unfortunately, some interviewees do decline interviews by ignoring e-mails and phone calls, so have at least one backup interviewee. Other times, people simply forget or lose emails, and your follow-up reminder will be enough.

Think About It

- What kind of information are you trying to get from this interview?
- What answers will be the most useful and why?
- Why is this person the best choice for an interview on this topic?
- What's the most memorable or interesting thing your interviewee said?
- What did you learn from this interview that you didn't know beforehand?

Having a plan for your interview can really help you get the most out of it getting you the information you really need for your writing project.

Evaluating Sources

Chapter 2: Section 3, Lesson 7

Academic papers and writing projects require the most relevant and authoritative sources you can find, but how do you know what the best sources are? Similarly, academic sources like journal articles and academic monographs (works on narrow, specialized topics) provide valuable, detailed information, but how can you tell whether the source you've found is a reliable one?

The Internet has changed how people perceive the credibility of sources; you need to be more aware than ever of the quality of your research. You'll find a lot of resources in an online search: there are many highly credible academic blogs, but you'll also find many journals that are not peer-reviewed; you'll find biased and personal websites as well as websites that are professionally researched, edited, and published. The boundaries between research methods—like using the library, doing field research, and using the Internet—have broken down. Using the library now often means using the Internet to access the library, and conducting an interview often means using email to send the questions and gather answers. In order to effectively evaluate sources, you should first understand two important types of sources.

Types of Sources
Whether you find your source in print, online, or in a different medium, it will fall into one of two basic types—primary or secondary.

Primary Sources
A primary source is a document, object, communication, or other material from the time period or issue you're studying. If you conduct field research, the information you gather is from a primary source. Any results of observations, surveys, or interviews are primary data, whether those surveys and interviews took place in person, by email, or by other electronic means. If you conduct an experiment in a biology or psychology class, the resulting data are primary. If you conduct a literary study, then the primary source is the piece of literature that you need to research. Primary sources include historical documents as well as physical objects such as artifacts.

Secondary Sources
In contrast, secondary sources are ones that comment on, analyze, critique, or reflect on primary sources. Secondary sources often include books about your subject, journal articles, blog entries, websites, newspaper articles, and social media commentary about a topic you're researching. A secondary source may come from any number of publications discussing your topic.

Distinguishing Types
Both primary sources and secondary sources can be relevant to and necessary for a given research topic. Depending on your assignment, the topic you're researching, and the requirements of your instructor, you might use only primary sources, only secondary sources, or a mix of both.

It can be easy to confuse the two types of sources, especially given the way the Internet has challenged the traditional boundaries mentioned above. A source that is "secondary" for one assignment can be "primary" for another assignment.

For example, if you were researching the Iraq War, first-hand reports from Iraq by citizens and soldiers would be primary sources, while articles, blog posts, and social media posts about the war from commentators, writers, and others would likely be secondary sources. However, if you were researching social media responses to the Iraq War, the social media posts themselves would be primary sources; newspaper articles about social media would be secondary sources.

If you're confused as to whether your source is primary or secondary, try to identify its relationship to your topic. Is it a source that originates from the time period or issue you're researching (that is, a primary source), or is it a derivative source that comments on, critiques, or analyzes the primary source (that is, a secondary source)?

Evaluating Sources
When conducting research, you should choose the best sources to use in the paper. The following list provides just a few of the criteria you can use to help you evaluate and choose sources:

Relevance
Think about whether you actually need the information. Don't use a source simply to lengthen your bibliography or essay. Every source should be both important to and necessary for your paper.

Author
How is the author of the source identified? What connection does he or she have to the material? For example, does the author have a degree in the field in which he or she is writing? How extensively has he or she published in this area? If the source is not academic, what personal or professional connections does the author have to the topic? Look for the author's biography or credentials in the source itself, or search for the author's name online.

Credibility
Credibility deals with whether the source is believable or trustworthy. What stated or unstated political, corporate, social, or ethical goals does the author carry? Separate from the author, who is hosting, publishing, or promoting the source and why? How might these factors, motivations, and goals affect the source's credibility? How trustworthy is the author? Do there appear to be obvious or ambiguous omissions or even errors?

Publication Date
Books, journal articles, magazine editorials, field research, and websites often indicate a publication date. In electronic sources, the publication date can be confused with other dates, such as dates regarding the last time a website was docs. A blog will often display many dates—dates for individual blog entries, comments, replies, etc. Use the date that is most relevant to the item you're considering. If a book lists multiple dates on its copyright page, the most recent date is usually the publication date for that edition. On a blog post, look for the date associated with the specific entry you're reading. Note that undated sources aren't necessarily worthless. Limited edition publications, primary sources, and historical material might be undated but still very valuable based on other criteria, such as author or relevance, especially if the date or time period can be guessed. Think twice about using undated sources with other warning signs, though. Such sources might include undated personal websites containing general information; anonymous, undated blog comments; and undated social media posts that can't be traced to a specific user or person.

Audience
Evaluating the audience is a matter of considering for whom the source, information, or item was published, photographed, written, or compiled. Who did the author, creator or publisher hope would read or access this material? What is the author's agenda or bias? For example, is the author hoping to influence a specific demographic, person, organization or group of people? Or is the author explicitly or implicitly advocating for a specific change of some kind, whether social, economic, or political? The same questions can be asked of the publisher, not just the author.

Length
Length is an important factor for any source, but it's not a defining one. An academic journal article can provide detailed information about a topic. An academic or professional blog can provide a concise opinion from a scholar in the field in less than a few hundred words. The amount and type of information your assignments require will help you determine which sources to use.

Think About It

- What kind of research will you use—secondary sources, or primary sources, or both?
- Where will you find these sources?
- How will you know whether your sources are credible?

Evaluating your sources requires that you understand the type of source and that you think about its

credibility based on at least some of the criteria discussed above.

Using Your Sources Wisely

Chapter 2: Section 3, Lesson 8

Maybe you've heard the theory that Francis Bacon actually wrote some of the plays attributed to Shakespeare and that Shakespeare took credit for them. Shakespeare didn't have a keen-eyed professor to contend with, but students do, and it's important to know when and how to use outside sources—and how to avoid plagiarizing them!

Knowing when to use outside sources is important because many essays neither require them nor benefit from them. *Knowing how* to use outside sources is necessary so you can identify your sources in a recognizable way, allowing readers to do more reading into the topic and allowing you to integrate research in an organized way. *Knowing how to avoid plagiarism* will strengthen your own confidence in your writing and research abilities and avoid the possibility of academic discipline.

When to Use Outside Sources
While common knowledge doesn't require the use of outside sources, more specific information does require using them. It's important to use outside sources from necessity rather than convenience.

Common Knowledge
You might want to use outside sources if you need to illustrate your discussion with information that is not common knowledge. Common knowledge is information that's generally widely known—the sky is blue, car accidents happen from time to time, some people get married, and many people go to work each day. You can assume that you and your readers share this common knowledge. As such, it isn't necessary to document common knowledge, either with in-text citations or bibliographic entries.

Specific Information
However, in some essays, you might need to use specific information that isn't common knowledge: What physical or scientific process makes the sky appear blue? How often do car accidents happen, and are they worse in specific cities, or were they worse in specific decades? What cultures or religions emphasize marriage, and are there any cultures in which people do not get married? What is the current unemployment rate, and what industries are adding jobs? Finding out this information requires that you research to locate sources; getting the information to readers requires you to document your sources.

Necessity
It's important to know that the use of outside sources is a means toward an end. Writers use outside sources to illustrate an issue, support an argument, provide context, make an evaluation, and so on. If you use outside sources, these sources should be necessary to illustrate your discussion. Sources shouldn't be used to pad a discussion or meet a minimum word-length requirement.

How to Use Outside Sources
There are three important ways in which you can bring outside sources into your paper: through summary, paraphrase, and direct quotation.

Summary
A summary is a brief statement that relays an idea from a source. For example, you might need to summarize the two or three key findings of an academic study or the main argument of a newspaper's editorial from a particular day. A summary doesn't present every detail from the original source; rather, it presents only the key idea(s). If you summarize a key finding, idea, conclusion, theory, or opinion from a source, you should include an in-text citation so that your reader can accurately identify which source included that idea. For any in-text citation, you also need a corresponding bibliographic entry for each source that you cite.

Paraphrase
Paraphrases involve more detail than summaries. Whereas a summary involves highlighting the key idea(s) from an outside source, a paraphrase usually offers the same amount of detail as the original source offered. When paraphrasing, you should present one or more pieces of detailed information

from an outside source, but do so in your own words. For example, you might need to paraphrase a passage from a study that discusses detailed quantitative findings, or you might need to paraphrase the four or five key supporting reasons discussed in the newspaper editorial. Of course, when you paraphrase, you'll include an in-text citation and a corresponding bibliographic entry for each source that you cite in text.

Direct Quotation
If a source has phrased a piece of information in a particularly effective, fresh, or appealing way, you might want to quote that source in your essay. The length of your quote will depend on the nature of the section you want to quote and how it relates to your own discussion. If the quote is a single sentence, part of a sentence, or a lengthy passage, you must include the direct wording from the original as well as quotation marks around that wording. (For more on how to punctuate direct quotes, see Quotation Marks.) Just like summary and paraphrase, you need to include an in-text citation to let your reader know where that quotation comes from. Note that when quoting longer passages, some style guides require that you specially indent the quotation rather than using quotation marks to demarcate it; this is usually called a block quotation. As with any in-text citation, you also need a corresponding bibliographic entry for each source that you cite in text. To hear more details about different style guides and their standards for citing direct quotes, see MLA, APA and Chicago/Turabian.

Avoiding Plagiarism
Many times, you can avoid plagiarism by double-checking for errors in the documentation of a source. Many good, honest writers unintentionally plagiarize simply because they don't double check their citations. Don't let that happen to you!

Intentional Plagiarism
A writer might intentionally plagiarize by copying sentences or paragraphs from another source and pasting them into his or her own piece of writing with the intention of presenting these sentences or paragraphs as his or her own words. Or a writer might intentionally plagiarize by rewriting another's essay and presenting its ideas as his or her own. Intentionally presenting another writer's words or ideas as your own constitutes plagiarism, a form of academic dishonesty, and it often carries heavy consequences such as failure of the assignment, failure of the class, and even permanent expulsion from the school.

Accidental Plagiarism
Accidents and errors in documentation, while not necessarily academically dishonest, are still a serious academic issue. For example, you might open your writing up to charges of plagiarism if you paraphrase information, such as an idea, figure, or statistic, and forget to include the citation. In cases like these, your reader will have trouble differentiating the source's ideas and wording from your own. While such errors are not necessarily intentional, they do affect the credibility of your writing because you aren't attributing ideas and wording to outside sources in a correct and consistent way. If readers can't trust one part of your essay, how do they know they can trust other parts?

Avoiding intentional plagiarism is easy: you should never wish to present another's writing or ideas as your own. Avoiding accidents and errors is more difficult but no less important. Proofread your essay carefully from a printed copy to ensure that your writing includes the necessary citations and quotation marks. Watch carefully for key facts that need accompanying citations.

Think About It

- When is it necessary to incorporate outside sources into your writing?
- Where should you summarize, paraphrase, or quote from your sources?
- Which documentation errors need to be polished to avoid accidental plagiarism?

Using your sources wisely requires that you consider why you want to use research, how you want to use research, and how to avoid plagiarism.

Documentation

Chapter 2: Section 3, Lesson 9

Any time you write an academic or professional paper and use information from another source, you must give credit to that particular source. The information you use can include quotations, summaries, paraphrases, and any fact that isn't common knowledge, including charts, pictures, and graphics from websites; therefore, any of these types of information must be clearly documented. By giving credit to the source, you provide readers with enough information that they can find the cited source if they want to.

What You Need to Document

Anytime you use information that isn't your own original idea, you need a citation. You also have to cite your own work if it's taken from a paper written for a different assignment; always clear this with your instructor first. Typically, you'll need to cite ideas, direct quotations, and paraphrases, all from outside works.

Ideas

You're reading an article as you gather information for a research paper and happen upon a great idea. Although you don't necessarily want to use a direct quotation from the article, you do really like the idea. Even if you only use an idea that belongs to another author, you must document it. Using someone else's idea without citing that source is considered plagiarism. For more information on avoiding plagiarism, see Using Your Sources Wisely.

Direct Quotations

Any time you use an author's exact words, you need to let your reader know that those words belong to someone else. You'll do that by putting the other person's words inside quotation marks. You'll also need to include a signal phrase and an in-text (or parenthetical) citation.

Paraphrases

When you take an author's words and put them into your own words, it's called *paraphrasing*. As is true with referring to an idea that belongs to someone else, when you paraphrase, you need to document the original source. In other words, you'll want to let your reader know where you're getting the information that you've paraphrased.

Why You Need to Document

You want and need to document for a number of reasons, including the following:

Show People Where Your Information Originated

Your readers might want to know more about your topic. If you document properly, a reader can go to your sources to get even more information about a subject that you refer to in an essay. In this way, documenting serves as a road map for people who want to do additional research—beyond what you present in your writing project.

Avoid Plagiarism

Without documentation in an essay that involved research, you run the risk of being accused of plagiarism. Plagiarism occurs any time a writer presents ideas and words as his or her own when they were composed by someone else. Researched writing is about bringing ideas and information together in one place. However, if you don't make it clear that some information came from sources beyond your own experience and knowledge, then you are misrepresenting the original author. Most schools have strict consequences for plagiarism. If you're writing for a nonacademic audience and you plagiarize, it's likely you'll lose your credibility. (For more on this topic, see Using Your Sources Wisely.)

Give Your Essay or Writing Project Authority

When you refer to credible sources, you give your text weight. If you refer to experts in the field about

which you are writing, readers will be more likely to take your work seriously.

Styles of Documentation
Writers use different styles of documentation for different academic disciplines. You'll most likely use the Modern Language Association (MLA) style for English courses or courses in the Humanities. Courses in the social sciences are most likely to require The American Psychological Association (APA) style. The Chicago/Turabian style can be used in any discipline and is often relied on for professional use within the publishing industry. You should use the style chosen by your instructor regardless of what discipline or field you're working in for your class or essay. The good news is, documenting a source in an essay is often a two-step process. (To see more on each style discussed above, refer to MLA, APA and Chicago/Turabian.)

Think About It

- What ideas and/or information from outside sources did you include in your paper?
- Where are quotation marks needed to show readers the original author's exact words?
- What style of documentation do you need to use to create citations according to your instructor's preference?

Documentation won't take up too much extra time, but its benefits are tremendous. Proper documentation will help show your readers where you retrieved your information and give you integrity as a writer.

Documentation: MLA Style

Please see the Smarthinking MLA Guide.

Please the Smarthinking APA Style 7th Edition Guide.

Documentation: Chicago/Turabian Style

Please the Smarthinking Chicago/Turabian Style Guide.

Documentation: Harvard Style

Chapter 2: Section 3, Lesson 9

Please the Smarthinking Harvard Style Guide.

Developing Ideas

Chapter 2: Section 4, Lesson 1

Imagine this scenario: You've picked out a topic for your paper and have begun writing. As you start putting ideas down on the page, you find yourself getting stuck. How do you take a handful of big ideas and turn them into a paper? What do you do to make your readers understand what you're saying? The key to these questions involves developing supporting ideas.

An important part of the writing process is including evidence and support with the ideas that appear in body paragraphs. Often, this step in the writing process will be most useful after the general organization of the essay is worked out. Once you know roughly what you're going to say, you can begin developing the details.

Using Details and Examples
In any type of essay, from a personal narrative to a researched argument, using examples is one of the best ways to develop your ideas. Writers often start off by writing in rather general, non-specific terms. For instance, look at this excerpt from a student's draft of an essay about her childhood:

When I was in my teens, my family moved to Ohio. There were a lot of fun things to do in my town, but I spent most of my time feeling pretty bored because I didn't have any friends yet. I hung out in my room and tried to entertain myself there. At night, my brother and I would sometimes go out and do things.

Although this writer is getting her general idea across, it's probably difficult for you to really imagine anything about her life in Ohio because she hasn't used detailed examples of what that life was like. Her readers may believe her when she says that there were fun things to do in her town, but they have no idea what kind of fun things she means. They might also wonder how she entertained herself in her room and what she and her brother would do when they went out at night. Here is how this student revised this section of her essay using examples:

When I was in my teens, my family moved to Findlay, Ohio, a little town in the northwest corner of the state. Findlay had plenty of movie theaters, restaurants, coffee shops, and malls. It had a few nice parks, too, but I spent most of my time bored and alone because I didn't have any friends. I hung out in my room a lot, writing in my leather-bound diary and listening to the Beastie Boys. Occasionally, I redecorated my walls by hanging new posters or sticking glowing stars to the ceiling. At night, my brother Fred and I would sometimes go out and walk down Main Street, looking in store windows and imagining where we would both be in five years.

The basic ideas of this student's essay are the same, but in this draft they're much more developed. Her readers can now see what she's talking about because she's used specific examples: *movie theaters, restaurants, coffee shops, mall, parks, writing in my leather-bound diary, listening to the Beastie Boys*, etc. Not only has she made her essay more specific, but she has also made it more original and personal. It has become an essay that is uniquely hers because there are specific details and examples from her life within it.

Using Evidence and Support
As a student, you will often be asked to write essays that make an argument or try to persuade. In these kinds of essays, it's important to not only make your point but also to support that point by including evidence to back up your claims.

Evidence can include simple examples that illustrate the argument the writer is making. If, for instance, you were trying to persuade your readers that seatbelt laws should be more strongly enforced, you could include a detailed explanation of how seatbelts save lives in an accident. You could even include a story about when a seatbelt saved your life. This kind of evidence can really help to persuade your readers to consider the argument more carefully.

Sometimes, though, written arguments require stronger support than personal experience and

opinions can provide. In these cases, the argument needs outside support. If you wanted to create an even more persuasive essay, you could include some facts and figures that prove seatbelts save lives. For example, you might share statistics comparing the percentage of people who survive car accidents while wearing seatbelts with the percentage who survive without wearing seatbelts. Of course, you'd need to do some research to find these figures.

If you wanted to bring an expert into this research, you might even interview a police officer about seatbelt usage. Even though an officer may only have opinions on the issue, his or her opinions will carry more weight than a student's due to the officer's work experience.

It may be helpful to review Evaluating Sources, which will give you more information about which sources are best suited for your writing.

Think About It

- What are the most important ideas you need the readers to understand?
- What kinds of examples and/or evidence would help support those ideas?
- How might you present these examples and/or evidence?
- How do these supporting ideas help your readers understand your overall point?

Creating supporting evidence and examples can help your ideas come to life. These fully-developed ideas will connect your readers with your writing, making for a more engaging and interesting paper.

Developing a Thesis

Chapter 2: Section 4, Lesson 2

A London art museum once featured an exhibit with a plain canvas, symbolizing the potential of an uncreated work. Writers face the same scenario when staring at an empty page or blank screen. And just as an artist starts a masterpiece with a few strokes, you might begin a paper by writing out a working thesis statement, hoping to encompass the central theme of the essay.

Thesis Statement Basics

All writing, no matter what form it takes, has a primary topic. In a well-developed academic essay, this primary topic is usually expressed in a thesis statement. A thesis is typically a sentence that gives the writer's main idea about the topic. Depending on the essay's purpose and audience, the thesis could be an argumentative, analytic, or evaluative claim or a main purpose for exploring the topic. Different assignments and instructors require different approaches to thesis-writing, but a strong thesis will help your readers understand your essay's main purpose and how it will achieve that purpose.

How to Write a Thesis

Your thesis will depend on the main idea and focus of your assignment. For example, if you're writing an argument, then your thesis will likely provide the argumentative claim your essay will defend. If you're analyzing a short story, then your thesis will address the literary elements your essay will discuss.

A thesis should include a clear statement of the essay's main idea: *The setting of* Les Miserables *foreshadows the outcome of the plot, suggesting that a person's destiny is determined by their environment.* If you are in a composition class or a university prep class, your instructor might also expect that your thesis previews your essay's subtopics; this is sometimes called a "list thesis" or a "three-point thesis," if the essay has three subtopics: *Through the night scenes, the constant storms, and the war-time background, the setting of* Les Miserables *foreshadows the outcome of the plot, suggesting that a person's destiny is determined by their environment*. Such structured thesis statements are especially common in five-paragraph essays but less common for most other types of essays.

Before you set up your thesis, determine your main idea and the focus of your assignment, and check for any special requirements your instructor has provided. You may also think about choosing body paragraph topics before writing a thesis because the topics will give a clearer sense of the information the thesis should preview. If you're using a list-style thesis, then your thesis may outline the exact subtopics you'll use to support your main idea. If you're using a different thesis format, your thesis will still provide your draft's main idea. The two examples above illustrate different forms that a literary analysis thesis might take, but there are many other thesis possibilities depending on your topic and premise:

- **Argument:** *The campus should implement an outdoor smoking ban because smoking negatively impacts student health and university reputation.*
- **Cause/Effect:** *Although many teens enjoy social networking, it can be detrimental overall because it can lead to several harmful effects.*
- **Descriptive Essay:** *The nature preserve is one of the most relaxing and peaceful places on campus because of several characteristics.*

As you frame your thesis, try to avoid announcing thesis statements (*The following essay will argue that . . .*); simply state your main idea as the examples above demonstrate.

When to Write and Revise a Thesis

You'll probably work on the thesis during at least two stages of the writing process. As you do, keep these tips in mind:

- Read the instructions or assignment description and decide what type of main idea and body paragraph topics are appropriate

- Choose which main idea you'll develop
- Choose topics to develop into separate body paragraphs
- Draft a thesis that gives your main idea and consider whether a preview of the body paragraphs is useful
- Draft the essay
- Review the first draft to determine if your main idea or body paragraph topics have changed from your original plan
- Revise the thesis as needed to reflect the main idea and body paragraph topics you'll include in the next or final draft

Possible Thesis Variations

As you think more about the thesis and its possibilities, some additional options will be helpful to remember. For example, if you're having trouble drafting the thesis, you might want to "freewrite" before choosing the main idea and/or body paragraph topics as a way of discovering your intentions and ideas. Also, if you revise, delete, or add body paragraphs to an essay draft, the thesis will need to reflect these changes, evolving as the paper evolves. On the other hand, if the first draft stays close to your original intentions, the thesis may not need to be revised for the second draft.

Where to Place a Thesis

Most instructors and readers expect to see a thesis statement at the end of the introduction. Typically, your thesis will appear in the first or second paragraph to prepare readers for the body paragraphs. Placing the thesis at the beginning of the introduction can be problematic because readers typically need some preparation and background information about the topic; most of the time, then, the thesis closes the introduction and leads to the essay's body. Personal and narrative essays may save the thesis for the concluding paragraph or even use an implied thesis—a main idea that is clear based on the entirety of the draft but isn't explicitly stated in any one sentence. When in doubt about where to place the thesis, check with your instructor.

Think About It

- What main idea do you want to express about your essay's purpose?
- How well does the first draft of the thesis express the main idea?
- As the paper evolves, how should the thesis change to best prepare your readers for what you've written?

Drafting and revising a clear thesis benefits you and your readers. A strong thesis tells readers what the essay will achieve but also makes your purpose clearer to you, leading to a more enjoyable writing process.

Formal and Informal Outlines

Chapter 2: Section 4, Lesson 3

Picture Matthew McConaughey in a tuxedo making a speech at the Oscars. Now picture him in one of his many movie roles—perhaps walking the beach in a romantic comedy. The first setting is very formal, while the second is quite informal. You can think of formal and informal outlines the same way. Formal outlines follow rules and must meet several requirements—much like a movie star dressed in a tux for a special event. Informal outlines are less defined—like an actor strolling shirtless on the beach.

Informal Outlines

The easy-going informal outline is often used to plan an essay. Your instructor might assign one to help you brainstorm, but more often, you'll put an informal outline together in the course of prewriting. Say you're writing an essay about the greatest movies ever made. An informal outline can be as simple as this:

Greatest movies

- *Citizen Kane*
- *Gone with the Wind*
- *Casablanca*
- *The Sound of Music*

That's it. No Roman numerals, no fancy spacing, and definitely no Matthew McConaughey. Formal outlines, however, are quite a bit more technical.

Formal Outlines

Many instructors assign formal outlines as preparation for longer or more complex essays. Even if not assigned, a formal outline helps you visualize an essay's organization and plan your ideas. First, check out this fairly simple blank outline example.

I. *MAIN IDEA*

    A. *Supporting idea to I*

    B. *Supporting idea to I*

    C. *Supporting idea to I*

II. *MAIN IDEA*

    A. *Supporting idea to II*

    B. *Supporting idea to II*

    C. *Supporting idea to II*

III. *MAIN IDEA*

    A. *Supporting idea to III*

    B. *Supporting idea to III*

    C. *Supporting idea to III*

Now, here's how a formal outline might look for an essay on problems with physician-assisted suicide:

I. *Introduction*

     A.   *History of "Death with Dignity"*

     B.   *Existing laws*

     C.   *Thesis statement*

II.   *Incorrect life expectancy predictions*

     A.   *Overly pessimistic predictions*

     B.   *New ways to extend life*

III.   *Missing safeguards*

     A.   *Depression*

     B.   *Lack of witnesses*

     C.   *Falsified records*

IV.   *Potential for abuse*

     A.   *Burden on family*

     B.   *Burden on finances*

V.   *Dangerous precedent*

     A.   *Cases from Europe*

     B.   *Forced euthanasia*

VI.   *Conclusion*

The more complex your topic, the more likely you'll extend into several layers of supporting ideas. Here's another outline showing how some subtopics might be expanded in other ways.

Thesis: Marijuana laws need to be reconsidered in light of Colorado's many issues caused by full legalization.

I.   *Introduction*

     A.   *Background of "legalize it" movement*

     B.   *Background of Colorado law*

     C.   *Thesis statement*

II.   *Marijuana's effect on children*

     A.   *News story about fourth grader selling marijuana*

     B.   *Hospital reports of children sickened by marijuana*

          1.   *Edible marijuana*

          2.   *Marijuana overdoses*

III.   *Legal issues with marijuana*

      A.   *Driving violations*

          1.   *Increase in buzzed driving*

          2.   *Increase in border arrests*

      B.   *Public consumption violations*

IV.   *Marijuana-related deaths*

V.   *Conclusion*

As at a formal event, several rules apply when you write a formal outline:

- All subtopics must come in pairs at minimum. If you have an *A*, you must have a *B*. Otherwise, there's really no need for an *A*. If you have a *1*, you should have a *2*, and so on. This ensures that main points are not divided haphazardly.
- Start new subtopics under the first letter of the main point above. For example, *II.B.1* starts under the word *Hospital.*
- Your instructor may require that you write formal outlines in complete sentences; other instructors prefer phrases. If you write in complete sentences, use correct end punctuation as well. If writing in phrases, use parallel structure. For example, you might use noun phrases or –*ing* phrases. Don't switch back and forth.

Think About It

- How will you use this outline?
- What order makes most sense for your sub topics?
- What level of detail will be most helpful for the next step in the writing process?

Even if you do remember them from grade school, outlines aren't old fashioned or elementary. Outlines help you distill and organize your ideas, and creating an outline makes writing the first draft much easier!

Effective Introductions

Chapter 3: Lesson 1

Have you ever walked into a party and spotted a group of friends talking and laughing? You join the group and say, "Why is everyone laughing?" Their laughter got you interested; their answer gives you background or context to appreciate the joke. Readers want this same information at the start of a paper to decide whether to read the full essay. Sometimes writers struggle because they think the audience is the instructor and the context is the assignment itself; when writers expand their audience, most members won't have the full context. The reality, then, is that papers need complete introductions to make the entire essay effective for all potential audience members.

Writing and Revising
When to write the introduction and when to revise it are important questions for you to consider as a writer. Some tips will help you make these decisions.

Write the Introduction Last
Many people write effective introductions after the paper is finished. Why? Well, the easy answer is that the body of the paper is where you get to express and develop your ideas about the topic. The body is usually easier to write than the introduction because you probably have a pretty good idea what you want to say there. Sometimes drafting the body is similar to a brainstorming session in which you explore ideas. Once you finish the body, you go back and complete the first draft by adding the introduction.

Write the Introduction First
Some writers need to start at the beginning, which is also an acceptable strategy. The advantage of writing the paper this way is that you have a better idea of where you're headed before you begin the body. Either way works just fine—what really matters is that the introduction is effective.

Revising with Each Change in Content
Introduction revision is often overlooked because writers don't recognize that introductions may need to change when the essay content changes. Consider this scenario: Your original introduction addresses the importance of a college education for nontraditional students. In your second draft, you revise your body paragraphs, and the body now contains a discussion of the importance of a college education for traditionally aged college students as well. Which is easier to revise to make the two consistent: the introduction or the body paragraphs?

Strategies for Writing Effective Introductions
First, remember that if you're bored by what you're writing, your audience likely will be as well. The other points to keep in mind are that readers need to know why you chose this topic (context), and they want to know general information about the topic (background) to understand your thesis statement. This doesn't mean you only talk about the assignment; it means you help your audience understand the topic *from your perspective*. Here are some ideas to begin an effective introduction:

Inverted Pyramid
Begin with a general statement about your topic and then gradually become more specific, as seen in the opening sentences of this introduction:

Virginia Woolf is often discussed in terms of her mental illness because she committed suicide. What people need to discuss about her, however, are her literary works, especially A Room of One's Own*. This book talks about feminism before it was an acceptable, societal term.*

The first sentence is a general statement meant to intrigue the reader. The sentences that follow become more specific and continue to increase in specificity until the final, most specific sentence, the thesis statement (not included here).

Anecdote
An anecdote is a brief story that relates to your topic and interests your reader. You open the

introduction with an anecdote and then move into the background and context by showing how the anecdote relates to the subject of your paper:

My neighbor, Sam Jones, came home late the other day and was very excited. I asked him why, and he said, "I'm a college student!" Sam is 70 years old. Starting college right after high school can be frightening and difficult. Doing it late in life is unnerving and terrifying.

This anecdote is effective because it relates to the paper's topic about the difficulties of going to college late in life. Your introduction will continue to develop with more background and context until you present your thesis.

Rhetorical Questions
Like the anecdote, a rhetorical question can be used to open the introduction and interest the reader as long as it's relevant to the paper topic:

Does a four-year college degree still carry the same weight today as it did thirty years ago? Many experts answer no. Choosing whether or not to go to college is a difficult decision because it seems impossible to gauge the value of education versus the value of work experience.

As the anecdote did, this rhetorical question effectively leads to the topic because the question and topic are related. Again, the paragraph will continue to develop until you reach the thesis.

These methods will help you get started on creating an effective introduction regardless of whether you choose to write it first or after finishing the first draft of the paper's body. Either way, your entire essay will be stronger if there is a solid introduction.

Thesis Statement
Typically, the thesis statement is the last sentence in your introductory paragraph. In very rare cases, you can place it elsewhere, but only if you're certain it fits with the type of essay you're writing or you've been told by your instructor to move the thesis. For more information on writing strong thesis statements, please see [Developing a Thesis](#).

What Creates Ineffective Introductions
Quite simply, ineffective introductions don't do some or all of the work described above. Three of the most common errors that writers make include the following:

Direct Assignment Statements with no Background/Context
If you assume that your instructor is the audience and the assignment is your context, you're likely to open your draft with a sentence like this: *My paper explains why apples grow in Washington and not Florida.* Many papers open this way and then move directly to a discussion of why this statement is true. This method isn't effective because no one understands the paper's purpose or the background or context for the topic.

Generic Questions/Dictionary Definitions
Rhetorical questions are effective strategies, but general questions or dictionary definitions are not. General questions are something like this: *What is college? What is an education?* Dictionary definitions start like this: *The dictionary defines 'education' as . . .* Both of these openings are ineffective because they're overused and clichéd and neither will lead to strong background or context.

Broad Generalizations
These are all-encompassing statements that have little to no meaning. They may begin like this: *Since the beginning of time* . . . These types of statements tell your audience that you don't really know what you want to write because the topic is so broad that you simply can't address it in an essay (or even a book!).

Think About It

- What did you do to interest your reader?
- What did you do to show your audience how you're approaching your topic and what to expect in the rest of the essay?
- If you were your reader, what more might you need to know to prepare for the rest of the essay?

Effective introductions get your reader's interest and prepare them for writing to come.

Strong Conclusions

Chapter 3: Lesson 2

Objective

In this lesson, you will learn effective methods for writing powerful conclusions.

The Importance of Conclusions

Conclusions, as you have probably guessed, compliment the introduction. Keep in mind, however, that conclusions are not simply mirror opposites of introductions; rather, conclusions seek to reinforce and echo material stated in the beginning of the essay.

And just as writers don't begin their papers by leaping directly into the middle, writers also don't just abruptly end their discussion after making their main points. Instead, successful writers try to satisfy the reader's need for closure. Thus, a conclusion tries to accomplish the following

- Conclusions reinforce information stated in the beginning of the paper. In fact, conclusions often echo (not repeat, though) the main idea/thesis stated in the introduction.

- Conclusions provide a sense of scope. Just as an introduction tries to glimpse ahead, showing readers the path the writer plans to take, a conclusion provides a sense of "looking back," a sense of showing the reader the ground that has been covered.

- Conclusions attempt to leave readers with a final, lasting impression. Just as an introduction tries to "hook" the reader into reading more, the conclusion tries to leave readers with an endnote that resonates well after the reader has put down the paper. Often, leaving readers with a final, lasting impression means suggesting larger implications or showing how the main/idea thesis applies to the future.

Before You Begin

You might find it useful to write the body of your paper before you write the introduction and conclusion. Why, you might ask?

First, writers usually find it easier to draft the middle sections, the heart, of their essays. In fact, one way to overcome writer's block (that dreaded feeling when you look at the blank page and ask yourself, "Where do I begin?") is to simply jump into the middle of the essay rather than worry about how to start things off.

Second, writers often brainstorm during early drafts. By not worrying about the introduction and conclusion until later, you can write without fear of failure and then objectively review your work. Doing so might help you better see your main idea/thesis, and having a solid main idea/thesis is an important first step in writing a successful introduction/conclusion.

Conclusion Do's

- *Return to a technique that you used in the introduction.* One way to provide a sense of closure for your readers is to revisit material from your introduction. Going back to our "benefits of a college education" example, if you started your paper with an anecdote about your neighbor who successfully completed a four-year degree, you might want to return to this example again in your conclusion. Likewise, if you began your paper with a powerful quotation, you might want to include a different quotation from this person in your conclusion. Returning to techniques that you used in your introduction is a solid way to tie up loose ends and add a

sense of cohesiveness to your writing.

- *Echo your introduction's thesis.* Using different language than you used in your introduction, you might want to subtly reinforce your paper's thesis statement. Your readers will often expect you to recap your essay's main idea.

- *Stretch your paper's scope beyond the boundaries of your discussion.* Although you want to be careful about adding too much new information in your conclusion, writers often ask their readers to step just outside the boundaries of the paper. Writers do this by suggesting larger implications or discussing how the thesis applies to the future. For example, returning to our "benefits of a college education example," a writer might ask her reader to consider whether a college education will still be valued in fifty years and then briefly comment on this.

Conclusion Don'ts

- *Avoid a mechanical repetition of the introduction and its thesis.* Remember that a conclusion aims to echo-not repeat-the themes established in the introduction. Too often, though, students are tempted to repeat the introduction almost word for word.

- *Avoid cramming in content that you couldn't fit into the body of your essay.* Although writers often discuss larger implications in the conclusion, encouraging their readers to think beyond the scope of the essay, resist the temptation to use your conclusion as the "last chance" to throw in undeveloped and unannounced issues.

Summary

This lesson should familiarize you with the elements that help create strong conclusions. An effective academic essay should contain a solid conclusion. Keep what you've learned in this lesson in mind as you approach your next essay.

Clear Topic Sentences

Chapter 3: Lesson 3

Elvira says to Francesco, "The ideas in this article are crazy." Francesco, who isn't paying any attention to her, says, "What are you talking about? What ideas? What article?" He needs to ask her all these questions because her sentence is too broad and doesn't help him understand her topic; she hasn't provided him with context for her statement. Like Francesco, paragraphs require clear, focused topics. Topic sentences are usually the first sentence in the paragraph and tell readers what idea will be developed in the sentences that follow. They also help give your paper and paragraphs unity.

Recognizing Weak and Clear Topic Sentences

When a topic sentence is too narrow or too broad, you will have difficulty developing a strong paragraph. A topic sentence that's too narrow will leave you with nothing to say; it'll be a single-sentence paragraph, which definitely isn't effective. One that's too broad will lead to a paragraph with more than one main idea, which causes frustration and confusion for readers. The information below will help you recognize many types of topic sentences, including poor topic sentences that are overly broad or narrow *and* good topic sentences versus those that are clear and strong:

Narrow Topic Sentence

Not all starting sentences are topic sentences. While students often think a narrow statement at the beginning of a paragraph is a *topic sentence* simply because it comes first, this kind of detail should actually be placed in the body of the paragraph. Consider a sentence like this:

To register online, you need a PIN.

Well, that's good to know! Now what are you going to say in the rest of the paragraph? There's really nothing to add to this statement because it's a closed, narrow statement of a point you want to make. To correct it, you need to consider what broader topic you want to discuss:

The University online registration system is a secure system that is only accessible by students, faculty, and staff.

You now have a broader topic that will allow you to discuss the process of using this system, including information like needing a PIN to register.

Broad Topic Sentence

A broad topic sentence can lead to disaster because you want to go on and on, and the next thing you know, your paragraph is two pages long. These types of sentences leave too much room for more than one main idea to be introduced into the paragraph, which takes away from the unity of the paper and the paragraph:

Playgrounds are dangerous.

Think about how long the list of topics you could discuss based on this sentence would be. It's much too broad because there's no focus. What's dangerous about playgrounds? Why is this significant? What kinds of playgrounds will be discussed? These are just a few questions about several different topics that could be discussed in this paragraph. To correct this topic sentence, you need to narrow your focus:

The playgrounds in Smithville are dangerous because they still have playground equipment made from pretreated lumber.

This new topic sentence is stronger because it provides a clear focus for your paragraph. Your readers can now see the specific idea you're going to discuss in this particular paragraph. It's not so narrow that you don't have anything to talk about because it uses the general term "playground equipment," which allows you to discuss specific details within the paragraph. This topic sentence also helps you, as

a writer, because you have one clear idea to write about and won't be tempted to introduce new ideas that are off-topic.

Good Topic Sentence
Good topic sentences generally work to create paragraph and paper unity but could be stronger with some revision to help clarify the specific point you're trying to develop:

Walking is another good way to get exercise.

You could develop a paragraph around this topic sentence by explaining to your audience why walking is good and/or what particular kind of walking you're going to discuss. The sentence would be clearer, however, if you were to include information about what specific point you're going to cover:

Power walking while holding light hand weights is another good way to get aerobic and strength-building exercise at the same time.

Your readers now know the type of exercise you'll discuss and the specific benefits you'll show that come from this particular form of walking. It's still broad enough to allow you to develop your ideas while making it clearer to your readers what to expect as they continue to read.

Clear, Strong Topic Sentence
Even though the three corrected topic sentences in each section above are all examples of clear, strong topic sentences, you also need to know how to recognize a great one when you write it on the first try! This is what one might look like:

One way to print digital pictures is to submit them to an online printing company.

You do two very important things with a topic sentence like this. First, by saying "one way," you tell readers that the other paragraphs in your paper will discuss other ways to do this, which creates paper unity. Second, you tell them exactly what details to expect in this paragraph, which leads to paragraph unity.

Paper Unity
The term *paper unity* has come up a lot, so it's important to understand exactly what it means. When you finish your paper, what you want to have is a document that is whole or unified. Every paragraph should be relevant to the main idea you presented in your thesis. One very important way to do this is to write clear topic sentences that show readers the relationship between each paragraph and the thesis statement. For instance, for the topic sentence above about printing digital pictures, the thesis might be something like:

Taking pictures using digital technology is better than using film because you can print them using an online printing company, a personal printer, or an in-store service.

It's easy for readers to see how this topic sentence relates to the thesis, which will give the paper unity. For more information on writing strong thesis statements, see Developing a Thesis.

Paragraph Unity
Another important idea that's been presented here is *paragraph unity*. Paragraphs must focus on a single, central idea to be unified. You want only one main idea per paragraph because it gives you space to develop the idea and show readers the significance of what you're saying to the overall idea of the paper. The topic sentence is what makes this happen. Without a clear topic sentence, your thoughts may begin to wander, and the paragraph will become unfocused and, sometimes, meaningless. For more on writing strong paragraphs, see Powerful Body Paragraphs.

Think About It

- Which details do you need to incorporate into your topic sentences so they aren't too narrow?
- What limits did you place in the topic sentence to keep it from being too broad?
- What relationship is there between each topic sentence and the thesis statement?
- In what way is each sentence in the paragraph related to the topic sentence?

Clear topic sentences are the basis for powerful paragraphs and a cohesive, coherent essay.

Powerful Body Paragraphs

Chapter 3: Lesson 4

Whether or not you've ever built a house of cards, you can picture what happens when a card from the middle is pulled out: everything collapses. That's what happens when you don't have powerful paragraphs to support your essay. They're the backbone of a strong paper. It's your body paragraphs that develop the main idea and show readers the purpose of the paper.

Essay and Paragraph Unity
Before you think about the content of your body paragraphs, there are two basic points to remember:

Essay Unity
To unify the essay, every body paragraph in your paper should have a clear relationship to the thesis statement. The best way to make this happen is to start each paragraph with a strong topic sentence that clearly shows the relationship between the paragraph and your thesis statement. For more information on creating this relationship, see Clear Topic Sentences.

Paragraph Unity
Paragraph unity happens when each sentence within the paragraph supports and develops the idea in the topic sentence. When you follow this strategy, you'll discuss only a single idea within each paragraph. After writing a paragraph, check for unity by asking what each sentence says about the topic sentence. If the answer isn't clear, you should consider whether the sentence belongs within that particular paragraph. It may need to be moved or even deleted.

Strong Academic Paragraphs
While there are no hard and fast rules for what makes a powerful academic paragraph, there are two general guidelines to follow unless your instructor tells you otherwise:

Length
Academic paragraphs are generally five to ten sentences long. While paragraphs in creative writing or journalism might be only one or two sentences, academic paragraphs require more development.

Support
Every idea within your paragraph requires support to help readers see that you're making reasonable, valid points. Some strategies for developing support are discussed below.

Strategies for Developing Body Paragraphs
So maybe you're thinking, "Well great! Now you've told me what I need to do to create strong academic paragraphs, but how am I supposed to write paragraphs that long?" You can use three basic strategies—analysis, explanation, and example—to help develop paragraph content and support your ideas. While analysis and explanation should always be used together, example can be used alone or in conjunction with the other two.

Analysis
Analysis is a powerful tool that's easy to overlook, partly because there may be an assumption that what you're saying and the point you're making are obvious. However, that usually isn't true. Analysis helps readers understand the point a quote, paraphrase, or personal opinion is making:

"Powerful Body Paragraphs" states, "Strong paragraphs in academic papers are generally five to ten sentences long" (2015). This length is necessary to develop the paragraph topic. **[Quotation.]**

It is my opinion that people who text while driving are thoughtless. They do not recognize the danger they create for everyone around them when they text and drive. **[Personal opinion.]**

In both examples, the second sentence provides an analysis of the first to tell readers exactly what you want them to take from the quote or your personal opinion. Without this type of analysis, readers may misinterpret your meaning because they disagree with your ideas.

Explanation

This really goes along with *Analysis*, but it's sometimes difficult to understand how the two are different. *Explanation* tells readers why the quote/paraphrase/opinion and its analysis are relevant to your main idea:

"Powerful Body Paragraphs" states, "Strong paragraphs in academic papers are generally five to ten sentences long" (2015). This length is necessary to develop the paragraph topic. Recognizing the importance of length will lead to stronger paragraphs, which is the goal. **[Quotation.]**

It is my opinion that people who text while driving are thoughtless. They do not recognize the danger they create for everyone around them when they text and drive. Because texting drivers will not stop without real consequences, laws need to be created to punish them for their actions. **[Personal opinion.]**

The third sentence in both paragraphs helps readers see the relevance of the quotation and opinion to the main idea of the paper.

Example

Often, students use examples and then move on, skipping the analysis and explanation steps discussed above. Examples, like quotes, paraphrases, and personal opinion, require both analysis and explanation to make them effective:

One way to view writing strong paragraphs is to look at them as a house. The topic sentence is the roof under which everything must fit. The middle sentences are the rooms that go under the roof. The closing sentence is the foundation upon which everything sits to become whole. All parts of the paragraph "house" are necessary to create an engaging paragraph. **[Analogy.]**

My best friend was almost run over by someone who was texting while driving. Even though she got the person's tag number and took a picture, the police didn't write the driver a ticket because there is no law against this in my state. Her experience shows why this should be a punishable offense. **[Personal example.]**

These two partial paragraphs show how examples can and should be developed. The analysis and explanation helps readers see the point by using each as support in the essay.

Completing the Paragraph

If you add a topic sentence and closing sentence to any of the above paragraphs, each will reach the *minimum* of five sentences required for a powerful body paragraph:

Body paragraphs for academic papers are often difficult for student writers to develop because of their length. "Powerful Body Paragraphs" states, "Strong paragraphs in academic papers are generally five to ten sentences long" (2015). This length is necessary to develop the paragraph topic. Recognizing the importance of length will lead to stronger paragraphs, which is the goal. Once student writers learn how to use different strategies for development, their body paragraphs become stronger.

There is no "formula" for writing powerful body paragraphs, but these tips will help you get started.

Think About It

- What single topic unifies each paragraph?
- What should you ad or omit to properly support the topic sentence in each paragraph?
- Where should you expand paragraphs with analysis, explanation, and/or examples?

Well-developed body paragraphs are important tools for any essay. When unified, the paragraphs are powerful—they form a strong essay your readers will enjoy and understand.

Smooth Transitions

Chapter 3: Lesson 5

Millie is very smart. Glen runs track. Wait, what? What's the connection between these two statements? Without a smooth transition, readers have no way of knowing the relationship between the ideas, so they can't understand the point. Transitions help readers see the connection between your paragraphs as well as within them. Regardless of where or how you make transitions, their use is very important for creating paragraph unity and paper coherence.

Sentences as Transitions
Using complete sentences as transitions is very powerful and will make an essay stronger. This type of transition can be used in two different ways:

Transition Between Paragraphs
Moving from one paragraph to another can be tricky because, by definition, each paragraph should present a new idea. Showing readers how paragraphs relate can often be accomplished by connecting one or more ideas from the closing sentence of the previous paragraph to the upcoming paragraph:

As the statistics here show, children who are exposed to secondhand smoke have an alarmingly higher rate of emphysema, which also causes an increased rate of fatality. **[Closing sentence of a body paragraph.]**

The fatality rate of children exposed to secondhand smoke is much higher than for those who live in a smoke-free environment. **[Topic sentence for the next body paragraph.]**

By connecting the closing sentence to the next topic sentence through the fact about fatality rates, the transition allows readers to move smoothly from one paragraph to another, creating paper coherence.

Transition Between Sentences
Often, you can use this same type of transition to connect two seemingly unrelated or contradictory sentences. Consider the two statements about Millie and Glen; a sentence can help transition from one to the other:

Millie is very smart. She keeps all the stats for the track team, which is where she met Glen. Glen runs track.

By adding the second sentence, the first two sentences now make sense because you can see that Millie being smart relates to Glen running track. Now the two ideas are unified.

Keywords, Phrases, and Parallel Structure as Transitions
Frequently, writers use keywords or phrases from the thesis and topic sentences to transition between body paragraphs and between sentences within each paragraph. Another effective method of transitioning that is similar is the use of parallel sentence structure.

Words or Phrases From Thesis
The use of keywords or phrases from your thesis can be an effective transitional tool:

The article shows the relationship between driving electric cars and reducing damage to the ozone, which in turn slows global warming. **[Thesis statement.]**

Reducing damage to the ozone is a key factor in slowing the rates at which sea levels are rising. **[Topic sentence.]**

Readers immediately make the connection between this paragraph and the paper's thesis/main idea because the phrase *reducing damage to the ozone* is repeated, giving the essay more coherence.

Words/Phrases From Topic Sentences

Just as you use words and phrases from the thesis to transition, you can do the same with words and phrases that appear in topic sentences:

My father was a kind and gentle man. I expect men to be like my father, and I'm caught off guard when men are gruff or harsh.

The words *my father* from the first sentence, or topic sentence, are repeated in the second sentence to connect the ideas between the two statements, helping readers see their relationship.

Parallel Structure
You create these transitions when you write sentences that are structured the same:

My father was a kind and gentle man. My first husband was a crude and brutal man.

Readers can quickly connect the ideas in these two sentences because the sentences are structured the same: possessive pronoun (*my*), subject (*father* and *husband*), verb (*was*), adjectives (*a kind and gentle* and *a crude and brutal*), and object (*man*). The matching structure helps readers see the connection between two seemingly different ideas, making the writing flow smoothly.

Transitional Words/Phrases
Finally, familiar transitions! These words and phrases help readers solidify a relationship between your ideas. Here's quick list of some of the most common with the relationship they create:

- **Addition:** *and, also, in addition, furthermore*
- **Example:** *for example, for instance, specifically*
- **Compare:** *also, likewise, similarly*
- **Contrast:** *however, on the other hand, yet, although*
- **Summarize:** *therefore, in other words*
- **Time:** *after, before, during, next, finally, meanwhile, immediately*
- **Place/Direction:** *above, below, nearby, close, far, left, right*
- **Logical Relationships:** *therefore, consequently, as a result, thus, since, because*

Using these words at the beginning of and/or between sentences will help you move smoothly from one idea to the next by showing readers the relationship between ideas.

Implied Transitions and Problems with Transition Overuse
Often, paragraphs and sentences don't require a transition because the transition is implied:

I love basset hounds. Their ears are long and silky, their feet are huge and sturdy, and, best of all, they like to sleep as much as I do.

There is no need for a transition because the second sentence clearly explains why this person loves basset hounds. If you put a transition here, the unity of the paragraph is interrupted, and the paper loses its flow.

Each of the methods of transitioning in this lesson can be very effective, but *each must be used sparingly* so you don't disrupt the natural flow of the paper. When you use transitions, remember to vary them to keep the paper interesting!

Think About It

- What connection do you make between paragraphs to give the paper coherence?
- What connection should you include between sentences to create paragraph unity?
- Where can you eliminate unnecessary transitions because the transition is implied?

Transitions, when used wisely, make a stronger, more unified and coherent paper.

The One-Paragraph Essay

Chapter 3: Lesson 6

One of the most common writing tasks you may encounter, perhaps as a paper assignment or exam response, is the one-paragraph essay. This relatively short piece of writing—typically amounting to a page or less—consists of several sentences that focus on one subject, theme, or idea in response to a writing prompt. The prompt may ask you to describe a favorite place to study, to define a word in relation to its use within a particular passage, or even to explain how two characters in a story are alike. Regardless of the prompt, you can compose a successful one-paragraph essay if you have a good understanding of the subject material and are familiar with the following strategies for composing a strong paragraph.

Elements of a One-Paragraph Essay
An effective one-paragraph essay includes the following elements:

- **Topic Sentence:** The opening or "topic" sentence of a paragraph, much like an introductory paragraph of a fuller-length writing assignment, establishes the focus—or main idea—of the paragraph and captures the attention of your readers. (See Clear Topic Sentences for more details.)
- **Support Sentences:** The sentences that form the "body" of the paragraph provide support for the main idea established in the topic sentence. (To continue working on paragraph writing, see Powerful Body Paragraphs.)
- **Transitions:** Ideas can be organized and presented in many ways in a paragraph; transitional words or phrases help readers understand the logical connections between those ideas. (See Smooth Transitions for more on this topic.)
- **Summary Sentence:** The final or summary sentence of a paragraph, much like the concluding paragraph of a fuller-length paper, provides closure to the paragraph.

Strategies for Developing a One-Paragraph Essay
Review the Assignment Prompt
The one-paragraph essay assignment includes specific parameters for response that typically begin with a directive like *write one paragraph that describes/defines/explains/compares/argues.* Careful review of what the assignment is asking you to accomplish will help you determine what to write. (To read more about interpreting the assignment, see Analyzing the Prompt.)

Brainstorm and Outline Your Ideas
Write down the main points you want to discuss in response to the prompt and decide how you could organize these ideas so that they make sense to readers. If it helps, create a rough outline to follow as you develop the body of the paragraph. Let's say the assignment prompt asks for a process paragraph. You could brainstorm by outlining the steps it will take to complete a process that's simple enough to discuss in one paragraph.

Write a Topic Sentence
The topic sentence should state your main point in response to the prompt. It should also motivate your audience to read more of the paragraph. If the assignment prompt is a question, you can rewrite it as an answer or use keywords from it to create an effective topic sentence. The prompt for a process paragraph, for instance, asks *What process do you do often that you could easily explain in several steps?* In response, a topic sentence based on this question might look like this: *Making homemade hummus is a simple process that takes only several quick steps.*

Develop Your Supporting Sentences
It may seem daunting to figure out what to write (and what NOT to write!) in a one-paragraph essay. Keeping a basic outline in mind can help:

Main Idea: Your topic sentence
Supporting point 1: evidence/explanation
Supporting point 2: evidence/explanation

Supporting point 3: evidence/explanation
Summary Statement

For the process paragraph, each supporting point will be one step in the process. Supporting sentences can include a combination of stories, examples, descriptions, comparisons, definitions, statistics, and quotes.

Incorporate Transitional Words and/or Phrases
Relying on transitional words or phrases to connect your supporting ideas will help readers follow your train of thought as smoothly as possible. Phrases like *in addition, on the other hand, for instance,* and *as a result* are useful, but you can also transition with single words. Process paragraphs often use words like *next, afterward, also,* and *then*. When starting a sentence with a transitional word or phrase, you'll more than likely need a comma after the transition and before the main part of the sentence begins.

Write a Summary Statement
In the summary statement, you can provide closure to the paragraph by using one or more of these strategies:

- Paraphrase your topic sentence to reiterate the main idea of the paragraph
- Offer a conclusion that can be drawn from the information in the paragraph
- Challenge readers to think about what insights the information inspires in them
- Direct readers toward a specific action or feeling

A summary statement for the process paragraph on making homemade hummus could actually combine the first and last strategy: *By following these simple steps, you can make homemade hummus too!*

Proofread Your Paragraph
Reading back over your paragraph is important for several reasons. Of course, a careful reading can help catch typos, such as misspelled words or words that may be spelled correctly but that don't carry the meaning you intended (such as *to* instead of *too*). Proofreading is also helpful in case any information was left out, like an essential step in a process. If the hummus paragraph didn't include adding the garlic, the hummus would be little more than mashed up beans!

Special Considerations
A few final tips are useful to remember when writing a one-paragraph essay.

Scope
Because a one-paragraph essay is often written in response to a particular prompt, the scope of information will vary based on your purpose. You may be asked to write a descriptive paragraph instead of a process paragraph. Descriptions will rely on adjectives and may appeal to the senses by describing how something looks, tastes, or feels. Comparison and contrast paragraphs will analyze at least two different items, places, or people, looking at how they're similar and/or different. Cause and effect paragraphs examine how one issue, situation, or event is the result of another. More than likely, you'll only need to focus on one purpose for a one-paragraph essay.

Length
A typical paragraph contains anywhere from 3 to 10 sentences, depending on how much support the topic requires. One way to think about the balance of information in a paragraph is to compare it to the amount of food on a dinner plate. If the plate contains too little, you're hungry for more. If the plate contains too much, you feel too full, or overwhelmed. However, if you have just enough—a good balance of foods that go well together—you walk away satisfied. This is the feeling you want your readers to have once they're finished reading your paragraph.

Format
The first sentence of a one-paragraph essay is typically indented, which identifies it as a paragraph

form. However, be sure to check with your instructor or the assignment guidelines on formatting requirements.

Think About It

- How did you begin your paragraph to ensure that your readers understand your main point and are engaged with your writing?
- What kinds of evidence and explanations did you include to support your main point?
- What kinds of transitional words and phrases did you use to help readers understand the connections between/among your ideas?
- How did you end your paragraph so that readers feel a sense of closure for your ideas and can remember your main point?

An effective one-paragraph essay focuses on a single idea, includes enough evidence and explanations to support that idea, and leaves readers with a clear sense of closure.

Moving From the Rough to the Presentation Draft

Chapter 4: Lesson 1

Think of a story or a personal experience that you have told many times. How has it changed each time you've told it? Have you found yourself adding details to make it more vivid? How do you change which points you emphasize depending on your listener?

If you can answer these questions, you already know what it means to revise. You know what it means to reshape the stories you tell to suit your audiences and to polish your presentations with repetition. You know how new meanings emerge each time you recount something that happened to you or talk about a subject you're knowledgeable about.

What It Means to Revise an Essay

Revising a paper or project simply means to "re-see" it—to take another look at it and write another draft. When you re-experience a favorite book or movie, you find something new each time. Similarly, each time you revise a piece of writing, you find new ideas to develop and new areas to improve. Writing multiple drafts leads to stronger papers.

Notes Draft

A notes draft consists of your brainstorming and notes. It may take the form of a list, an idea-cluster, or a ten-minute freewrite. (See Using Invention Methods for brainstorming methods.) This is your first attempt at seeing—and writing or typing—what you want to say.

Rough Draft

From the notes draft, you move to your rough draft. As you revise from notes to the rough draft, concentrate on the overall meaning of the essay. Look through your notes draft to see whether there are any points that look like a thesis. Now, what points in that draft could be used to support the thesis —or what points might you need to add?

Once you organize the thesis with supporting points in a logical order, consider any further details each supporting point may need. Add detail, and add logical transitions from one point to the next.

Revised Draft

Once you've written your rough draft, give yourself a break. Ideally, set the draft aside for a day. When you come back, read through your rough draft slowly, pretending it's someone else's work. Make notes in the margins of a hard copy, or embed comments in the text on a computer file.

For the revised draft, focus most intently on your ideas. See the list below (What to Focus on in Revision) for specific guidelines. When you're finished looking at the bigger ideas, you can begin to correct wordy or unclear sentences and grammatical errors. For tips on correcting such errors, see Top 10 Writing Concerns.

When your revised draft is finished, you're ready to get readers' responses. Bring or send the revised draft to your instructor and/or to your class peer-review group.

Presentation Draft

For this draft, review the comments from readers to consider what they say about the "big" issues: the paper's thesis, the supporting points, and the examples. As you review readers' comments, ask yourself the following questions:

- What reasons do the readers give for their suggestions?
- What does a given reader seem to expect your paper to do?
- What do you expect to change based on a reader's response?
- What common concerns come up more than once in your readers' comments?

The answers should reveal how to use readers' comments to further revise. The draft could still change

substantially at this stage, and comments can get you thinking about your topic in a new way.

When you have made all the changes from your own thinking and from readers' comments, you have arrived at the presentation draft—the one ready to submit.

What to Focus on in Revision

- **Revise to fulfill the assignment:** What has your assignment asked you to do? A classification essay is different from a persuasive essay, which is different from a rhetorical analysis or a literature review, etc. What changes must you make to better fulfill the assignment? For more guidance, see Analyzing the Prompt.
- **Revise to clarify your purpose**: Why are you writing the paper (other than the mere fact that you were assigned to do so)? For example, if you're writing a persuasive essay, why did you chose your topic? Do you have an angle on your topic that few other writers express? In any kind of paper, what could you do to show your reader how you have made the topic your own?
- **Revise to address your audience:** How does your paper make clear who its intended readers are? What moves does it make to reach those readers? What changes might you need to make to come across to your readers as a trustworthy voice on the topic? Refer to Analyzing Your Audience and Audience Types for more information on audience.
- **Revise to clarify your thesis:** Which sentence(s) state(s) your thesis? If you can't find it, then clarifying your thesis is your first task. (Hint: The thesis might be at the end of the first draft; sometimes you have to develop an idea before you can realize what you really want to say!)
- **Revise to make your thesis more specific and debatable:** If your thesis is saying something so self-evident that no one could argue with it, how could you revise it to be more specific and forceful? Additional insight on the thesis can be found in Developing a Thesis.
- **Revise to connect your main points more closely to your thesis:** Write out the sentences that express the main points, or highlight your topic sentences in each paragraph. How does each one support your thesis? For more tips, see Clear Topic Sentences.
- **Revise to add more support for your main points:** What evidence do you have for each supporting point? Evidence includes your own detailed examples as well as findings from other researchers. Refer to Completing the Research Process to consider research strategies.
- **Revise for more coherence:** Since relationships between your ideas should be clear and logical, consider whether the reader can easily see how you get from one point to the next. Which transitions or signposts should be clearer, both within and between your paragraphs? For more on writing strong paragraphs, see Powerful Body Paragraphs.
- **Revise for a more effective opening and closing:** How does your introduction engage the reader? How does it establish a) your topic and b) your purpose in writing about that topic? In addition, how does your conclusion summarize your main points? What "food for thought" does it offer the reader? Check out Effective Introductions and Strong Conclusions for more revision ideas.
- **Revise for tone and diction:** What attitude does the paper convey? What image of the writer do you get from it—serious or playful? To what extent does the tone you have chosen sound right for your audience? What about diction (word choice)? Have you chosen words at the right level of formality for your paper's occasion—not too casual in a research paper and not too formal in a personal essay? See more in Consistent Tone and Voice.

Revising Versus Proofreading
The kind of work discussed above is called *revising,* which means to engage in depth with the essay's content. For additional insight, see Revising Content.
Revising should not be confused with editing or proofreading, which means checking each sentence for grammar and spelling errors. You should do that only at the very end of the multi-draft process. See Editing and Proofreading for more details on accurate proofreading.

Think About It

- What are ways that revision can improve your paper even when the first draft is strong?
- What changes need to be made between the notes draft to the rough draft?
- What should you revise after considering readers' comments?

Writing an essay (or story, or poem, or blog post, or . . .) is most rewarding when you allow the piece to grow over the course of more than one draft. As you develop your own multi-draft process, you'll see for yourself how revision, rather than being a separate stage in the writing process, is really an integral part of that process from start to finish.

Revising Content

Chapter 4: Lesson 2

The terms *revising* and *editing* are often used interchangeably among student writers, usually with a feeling of great dread. Once a draft is written, when the burden of the assignment feels lifted, and you long to turn it in and be done with it, do you consider re-reading it and looking for errors? While the need to quickly finish an assignment and turn it in can feel overpowering, taking some time after completing a draft to revise your work and make substantive changes will lead to a much stronger piece of writing.

Revising Versus Editing
Editing and revising are actually very different activities, and both are significant parts of the writing process for any essay. The act of *editing* or *proofreading* can be a simple one in which you correct typographical or grammatical errors so the writing is clean and clear, perhaps simplifying wordy sentences or making them clearer. This is the final step of the writing process and should be completed when the paper is nearing its final form.

Revising, on the other hand, is a much more involved process that gives you the chance to "re-see" the essay, perhaps after taking a break to get some distance from the material. When you revise your work, you frequently make substantive changes such as reordering paragraphs, deleting chunks of the paper, and even rewriting portions from scratch.

Writing in Steps
One thing all writers need to realize is that they can't do everything at once, at least successfully; the brain can only keep track of so many tasks at the same time. Because writing is such a complex activity, some of your thoughts and plans go by the wayside while you focus on other things. Once you recognize and accept this fact, you can gain better control over what you write because you know to focus on only a few thoughts at any one time.

Each writer approaches the writing process differently, but most begin by engaging in prewriting exercises to generate ideas. Then, they create an outline to organize those ideas before composing a first draft of the essay. At each stage, the writer is focused on a different aspect of the work, whether that be generating ideas, placing those ideas in the right order, or plugging those ideas into paragraphs. Once ideas are plugged in, the revision process can start. This is the stage where you'll review a paragraph or essay as a whole and ask yourself some fundamental questions to be sure the essay fits the assignment and provides the right information in the best way to the intended audience.

The more drafts you work through, the stronger and more focused the material can become. Therefore, revision isn't necessarily a one-time event in the writing process; it may happen multiple times over various drafts. Revision won't immediately lead to "perfect" papers, but there always needs to be a time when the essay is deemed complete. Continuing to practice the revision process will ensure a stronger paper next time, and it gets easier with practice.

Revising an Introductory Paragraph
First Draft
An example will show how revision can improve a paragraph of text. In this example, the writer has just completed a first draft of an introductory paragraph for an argument essay.

Why Public Schools Need Sex Education

Sex education in public schools has been a controversial topic to many for quite some time. There is a strong debate between comprehensive sex education versus abstinence only education, which also involves teaching no sex education at all. When the discussion involves the health and safety of children, teens, and young adults, it becomes a matter that cannot be overlooked. Public schools should be teaching effective and accurate sex education in order to improve the lives, safety and health of children and young adults. Sex education does not only affect their health and safety but

their right to proper and correct information about matters that affect them.

Revising the Paragraph
When you revise your work, you're not just correcting errors or deleting words, but you're looking for places where more information is required, where a better example might fit, or where chunks of text need to be removed, moved, or changed. Consider what this might look like for the above draft paragraph:

Why Public Schools Need Sex Education
Sex education in public schools has been a controversial topic for quite some time. **[<Remove this sentence and replace it with a better attention grabber to make the reader interested in the topic.]** *There is a strong debate between comprehensive sex education versus abstinence only education, which also involves teaching no sex education at all. When the discussion involves the health and safety of children, teens, and young adults, it becomes a matter that cannot be overlooked.* **[Add information about why it cannot be overlooked to better convince readers of my stance.]** *Public schools should be teaching effective and accurate sex education in order to improve the lives, safety and health of children and young adults. Sex education does not only affect their health and safety but their right to proper and correct information about matters that affect them.* **[<Remove this line and include earlier in the paragraph or in the conclusion. There is no need for further explanation after the thesis.]**

In this paragraph, the writer has highlighted sentences to delete and inserted notes as a guide for how to revise the paragraph. This strategy can help you to remember what to move and add so that you can read the entire work and then come back to make the changes.

Second Draft
Here's how the introductory paragraph might look after the revisions are complete:

Why Public Schools Need Sex Education
The U.S. has one of the highest incidences of teenage pregnancy of any developed nation (Centers for Disease Control). The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) cites sexual education programs that provide honest information about sex and birth control as a prime factor in the prevention and decrease of babies born to teenage parents. Sex education in public schools has been a controversial topic for quite some time. There is a strong debate between comprehensive sex education versus abstinence-only education, which also involves teaching no sex education at all. When the discussion involves the health and safety of children, teens, and young adults, it becomes a matter that cannot be overlooked. Abstinence-only education is costing every taxpayer and putting lives of teenagers and infants at risk. Public schools should be teaching effective and accurate sex education in order to improve the lives, safety, and health of children and young adults.

The paragraph is now improving significantly with content removed and added to create a stronger opening that grabs readers' attention and interest and begins to convince them that sex education in school is an important topic worth discussing.

Think About It

- How could your draft better express your message or argument to your readers?
- What parts of the draft might be confusing for readers?
- What content or evidence is missing that would make your point stronger?
- Where might you have too much information that is distracting readers from your main point?

By considering these questions and allowing others to read your work and provide you with honest feedback, you'll be better prepared to improve your essay and will become a stronger and more effective writer overall.

Editing and Proofreading

Chapter 4: Lesson 3

Editing. Proofreading. What are they exactly—and what's the difference? Some people use the terms interchangeably, but the two actions differ in their focus. Editing focuses on making sentences and phrases more understandable and accessible whileproofreading focuses on searching for typos, missing words, misspellings, and other small errors. Editing and proofreading are separate but equally important parts of the writing process; both help you improve the clarity and presentation of your writing.

Common Editing and Clarity Issues
The following are common editing and clarity issues many writers have. You may recognize some of these from your own past writing—most writers do.

Passive Voice
One common clarity issue is overusing the passive voice. Occasionally, you'll need to use passive voice, which consists of a *to be* verb (*is, am, was*, *are*, *will, be,* etc.) and the past participle of a main verb. This form often isn't necessary, however, and, since it can be wordy, avoid it when possible. Whenever you can, use active verbs alone to paint the picture for your readers. Compare these two sentences as an example:

- ***With passive verb:*** *Baking chocolate **is needed** to make these cookies.*
- ***With active verb:*** *A pastry chef **needs** baking chocolate to make these cookies.*

For more on these kinds of verbs, see [Active and Passive Voice](#).

Relying on *To Be* Verbs
Using various forms of *to be* can make your writing less active. Although *to be* by itself isn't passive, it doesn't have the same action or energy as most other verbs, so look for other options when possible. You might need to be creative! For example:

- ***To be verb: I'm*** *hot*
- ***Active verb: I'm melting*** *in the Florida heat*
- ***To be verb****: Mom **will be** excited to see us*
- ***Active verb****: Mom **will turn** flips when she sees us!*

For more on verbs of being, see [Being and Linking Verbs](#).

Padded Sentences
A "padded" sentence is the written equivalent of talking a lot but not saying much. Here's an example:

As one continues on with the reading of the novel, due to the fact that the author may be using some symbolism, one could or could not begin to notice that the main character's house at least somewhat symbolizes the world in which we live.

This sentence is confusing and convoluted, possibly because the writer isn't sure what to say about the novel's symbolism. If the writer avoids padding the sentence, it might read like this:

In the novel, the main character's house symbolizes the world.

You'll often see "hedge words" and phrases as padding, too:

Padded: *I think that this author is encouraging readers to perform a nightly rain dance.*
Revised*: This author is encouraging readers to perform a nightly rain dance.*

Padded: *In my essay, I'm going to argue that cats are better pets than frogs.*
Revised: *Cats are better pets than frogs*.

Big or Fancy Words
Writers sometimes believe using fancier or more complex words will make their writing more academic or formal, but this usually isn't the case: readers are more interested in discussion than vocabulary. You can write *The students conversed with their instructor*, but it's more effective to write, *The students talked to their instructor*. Whenever a simple word will work, use the simple word. It's often the more effective choice!

Common Proofreading Issues
The following are common proofreading issues that all writers—even professionals—watch for as they work toward their final drafts.

Missing Words
Many times, ideas flow quickly when you're composing a first draft. During that phase, it's easy to leave out a word, such as in this sentence:
The students realized teacher appreciated talking to them.

The sentence is missing the word *the* between *realized* and *teacher.* Since *the* is a short word and doesn't affect the sentence's main idea, readers often automatically insert the word as they skim the sentence, even if the word isn't actually there.

Errors a Spellchecker Won't Catch
Many people have seen the poem that explains how a spellchecker works, which includes the following play on words: "To rite with care is quite a feet / Of witch won should bee proud." Since a spellchecker only marks misspelled words, it won't mark misused words, such as *rite* instead of *write* or *witch* instead of *which*. *Rite* and *witch* are both spelled correctly, even though the words are incorrectly used in the poem. For more help in this area, check out Spelling Strategies or Common Homophones and Homonyms.

Personal Patterns of Grammatical Error
Even seasoned writers have certain writing hang-ups. Some writers have trouble with fragments while others overuse commas. For examples on correcting errors like these, refer to Top 10 Writing Concerns. Knowing your personal patterns of error will help you learn which issues you need to focus on more closely as you proofread.

Strategies for Editing and Proofreading
Try the following strategies, noting which option(s) work(s) most effectively and efficiently for your writing process. Most writers follow this order when proofreading, saving the last few strategies as a last resort You might want to experiment with using multiple strategies since every writer—and every writing assignment—is different!

Have a Friend Read Your Work Aloud While You Follow Along With a Printed Copy
This technique is a valuable way to hear how the work sounds to a reader who may not be familiar with the material or your writing style. Mark places where your friend has trouble smoothly reading sentences so that you know where to revise for clarity. As you listen to your friend and read along, you're also more likely to notice proofreading errors.

Read the Paper in Reverse Order
Print out a copy of your essay, and grab a blank sheet of paper for this exercise. Cover everything but the last sentence of your essay with the blank sheet of paper; then, read just the last sentence of your paper. Note any errors or confusing phrases you want to revise. Move the blank paper up so the second-to-last sentence is visible, and read that sentence. Reading in reverse order takes the sentences out of context, so it's easier to spot editing or proofreading errors.

Keep a Dictionary Handy
Refer to the dictionary—or a dictionary app—whenever you need to double-check the meaning or

usage of a word. Having the dictionary nearby, either in book-form or online, allows you to access it as you're editing. For more information, refer to [Using a Dictionary or Thesaurus](#).

Revisit the Work Later
Coming back to your essay after 24 hours—or 24 minutes—can be a great way to gain a fresh perspective. Writers are more likely to notice typos or awkward sentences after taking a break from the writing process.

Proofread a Printed Version
Reading a printed version allows you to mark errors as you read. Try placing a ruler under each line to maintain focus on only a single line or sentence. This approach also gives you a "new" perspective since the computer screen is removed.

Highlight or Darken the Text Background on a Computer Screen
When proofreading on a computer screen, highlight each sentence or darken the sentence's background as you read. Use the Text Highlighter tool in your word-processing program to change the color of the document's background for a single sentence. Changing the background helps maintain focus on just that single sentence.

Keep an Error Log
Noting which errors occur most often in your writing will help you to improve your proofreading. You'll learn your personal patterns of error so you can devote more attention to those patterns during the editing and proofreading stages. See [Keeping a Writer's Error Log](#) for a sample.

Read the Work Aloud
Reading the essay aloud may help you focus on each sentence so that you can hear awkward phrasing or other issues. Since you're reading aloud, you'll also read more slowly, which may help you catch proofreading errors.

Think About It

- Which elements should you focus on during the editing stage?
- Which elements need attention during proofreading?
- Which writing issue(s) should you regularly check for?
- Which editing and proofreading techniques benefit you most?

Editing and proofreading helps you to polish your writing assignments to improve your clarity and presentation. Every reader appreciates clear, error-free writing!

Nouns

Chapter 5: Section 1, Lesson 1

Children often grow up reciting that a noun is a person, place, or thing, but it's not as simple as that. Whatever exists, whether in our minds or in the observable world, must be named before it can be spoken or written about. When we name something—a person, place, material thing, or idea—it is most often a noun.

Singular and Plural Nouns

A noun is singular if it names one thing: *car, idea, blizzard.* Sometimes that one thing itself contains many things—*family, team, platoon.* These are called *collective nouns*, and in American English, they are almost always singular.

Most nouns are made plural by the addition of *-s:*

- *car/cars*
- *idea/ideas*
- *blizzard/blizzards*

If a noun ends in *-x, -ss, -ch, -tch,* or *-sh*, it requires an *-es* ending in order to be pronounceable:

- *box/boxes*
- *mattress/mattresses*
- *rich/riches*
- *watch/watches*
- *eyelash/eyelashes*

Some nouns are pluralized differently. Nouns ending in an *-f* sound may change the *-f* to a *-v* when pluralized:

- *knife/knives*
- *calf/calves*
- *leaf/leaves*
- *life/lives*

A singular noun ending in *-y* preceded by a consonant will change the *-y* to *-ie* before adding *-s*:

- *harmony/harmonies*
- *family/families*

Other nouns are pluralized in unpredictable ways:

- *child/children*
- *deer/deer*
- *person/people*

If you're not sure how to pluralize a noun, any good dictionary will let you know if the plural form is irregular.

Some nouns are not countable and cannot be made plural. Noncount (or mass) nouns, like *weather* and *milk*, are not pluralized. While dust is made up of millions of particles, *dust* itself is a noncount noun. Refer to [Count and Noncount Nouns](#) for more examples and a fuller discussion.

Proper Nouns and Common Nouns

A proper noun names a specific person, place, or thing. These include geographical locations (Amazon

River, Chicago), names of individuals (Fred, Harriet, Snoopy), specific times (Monday, September, Thanksgiving), languages (English, Sanskrit), departments, organizations, and religions (the Modern Languages Department, the United Nations, Russian Orthodox), and titles (*Middlemarch,* "Moonlight in Vermont"). Proper nouns are capitalized (see Capitalization). If a noun doesn't denote a specific person, place, or thing, it's a common noun.

Using Nouns
Like pronouns, nouns can be used as subjects and objects, or they can form possessives. That is, a noun can be the subject of a clause:

- ***Love*** *conquers all.*

Or a noun can be the object of a verb or preposition:

- *Lionel renounced **love**.*
- *He had fallen in **love** once too often.*

When a noun is used as subject or object, its format does not change. When it's used possessively, however, a singular noun needs an apostrophe and the letter *-s*:

- *Lionel would no longer be **love's** plaything* [i.e., the plaything *of* love].

A regular plural noun becomes plural first and then adds an apostrophe after the *-s:*

- *His **loves'** letters had meant everything to him.*

For more about punctuation and the possessive, see Apostrophes.

Noun Phrases and Clauses
A clause may function as a noun, as in this famous sentence:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.

The three "that-clauses" function as nouns, listing those self-evident truths.

A phrase—a group of words that hang together—can also function as a noun. In the following sentence, for example, both the subject and the predicate nominative are noun phrases: "*Falling in love with love* is *falling for make-believe.*"

Falling is a gerund—a verb which has been made into a noun. (Refer to Gerunds to learn more.) A noun clause or phrase is one that stands for one concept, activity, or circumstance.

Nouns Made from Other Words
Certain word endings act to build nouns from other nouns, verbs, and adjectives. Here are just a few:

- *-tion* and *-sion* make nouns out of verbs: *organization* (from *organize*); *emission* (from *emit*)
- *-ment* also makes nouns out of verbs: *government* (from *govern*), *argument* (from *argue*)
- *-ist, -er, -or* make a "one who does something" out of the "something" word: *trombonist* (from *trombone*), *performer* (from *perform*), *actor* (from *act*)
- Other noun-endings include *–acy* (*privacy*), *-ity* (*audacity*), *-dom* (*freedom*), *-ism* (*capitalism*), *-ence* or *–ance* (*maintenance, eminence*)

Think About It

- What endings do your nouns need to become plural or possessive?
- Which clauses or phrases stand for a concept, activity, or circumstance and are, therefore, nouns?
- What word endings could you use to build nouns from words already present in your writing?

If you're having trouble identifying the noun or nouns in a given sentence, look at how words function in that sentence. Once you've found the nouns, you can check how well they're doing their jobs: Remember that they can be singular or plural, possessive, subject or object, proper or common. Nouns need quite a bit of attention!

Personal Pronouns

Chapter 5: Section 1, Lesson 2

Pronouns are words which stand for nouns (including noun phrases and clauses) whose identity is given earlier in a sentence or paragraph. Personal pronouns stand for people and things. They include words like *I, you, he, she,* and *it,* as well as *them, mine, who,* and *whoever.* Personal pronouns take cases, which helps these seemingly simple words serve different roles in your writing.

Pronoun Antecedents

Personal pronouns are substituted for their antecedents (the nouns they replace). Prescriptive grammar historically required that pronouns agree with their antecedents in number and gender. However, language traditionally allowed for only two gender options (male or female), which many writers feel is unnecessarily limiting. As pronoun use has shifted, "they" is now widely accepted as a singular pronoun, which can be used to represent a variety of genders (or non-binary, gender non-conforming). Therefore, writers should take care to choose the pronoun option that best applies to the antecedent being replaced.

Personal Pronoun Cases

In addition, pronouns are the only English parts of speech that have cases. Pronoun cases can be equally confusing. You may carefully polish an essay but receive feedback about a pronoun concern in a sentence like *The snipe hunt had to proceed without Fred, Mort, and I* because you should have said, *me*, not *I*. But how are you supposed to know that?

Pronoun cases are the different forms personal pronouns take as they serve different roles within a sentence. Pronouns are the only parts of speech in English that have cases: **nominative, objective**, and **possessive.** Once you get used to that idea, choosing the correct form of the pronoun becomes easier. Here are the details of each case:

- Use the **nominative** case when the pronoun is acting as the subject of a clause (**He** *is cold*. **Who** *is coming?*) or as a predicate nominative after a linking verb (*The murderer was* **she!**). The nominative pronouns are *I, we, he, she, they, who,* and *whoever.* (The pronouns *you* and *it* and *which* and *that* are the same in both nominative and objective.)

- The **objective** case is used when the pronoun is acting as the object of a verb (*She slandered* **him**) or acting as the object of a preposition (*He danced with* **her***; he didn't care with* **whom** *he danced*) or the subject of an infinitive phrase (*Harold didn't want* **her** *to dance with George*). Objective pronouns are *me, us, him, her, them, whom, myself, ourselves, himself, herself,* and *whomever.*

- **Possessive** pronouns indicate possession or ownership (*She dropped* **her** *glass*. **My** *foot hurts*. *That dog is* **theirs**. **Whose** *shoe is this*?). Possessive pronouns include *my, mine, our, ours, his, her, hers, its, their, theirs,* and *whose.*

Often, when you understand how the sentence is put together, you'll know that a pronoun is incorrect simply because it doesn't sound right. Since most of the confusion is between nominative and objective cases, let's focus on those.

- Is a pronoun the subject of your sentence? Most of the time, your ear will tell you right away that *Me is sorry about your broken leg* is just wrong, as is *Him missed his plane last night.* Trying to use the objective form of a pronoun (*me* or *him*) as the subject just sounds wrong.

- Is the pronoun one of multiple subjects? This is trickier. *Adam and me are going to the movies* doesn't seem all that wrong. However, if you simply remove the other subject, you will probably pick up the fact that the case is wrong: *Me is going to the movies*. *Me* can't be the subject; it should be *I*. So, if *me* is wrong for a single-subject sentence, it's just as wrong for a multiple-subject sentence. When you have multiple subjects (two or more) in your clause,

remove all subjects but the pronoun. Then, you can choose the pronoun case that sounds right.

- Is the pronoun used to the right of the "to be" verb in a sentence such as *The Greatest American Hero is _____* or *Without a doubt, the winner of the pie-eating contest will be _____*? This is tricky, too, since *The winner is him* doesn't sound all that wrong. But if you switch the sentence around—and because it's a "to be" sentence, you can do this—you get *Him is the winner*. And that's certainly wrong! In an X = Y type of sentence, where Y is a pronoun, switch the order to Y = X, and you'll know which case to use.

- Is the pronoun the sole object of a verb or preposition? Then pay attention to your own instincts. Would you ever say *I hope you come along with I*? Of course you wouldn't, any more than you'd say *Armstrong trounced we in the finals.* Using the subject case where the objective case should be seems equally wrong.

- Is the pronoun one of the multiple objects of a verb or preposition? If so, perform the same experiment you just performed with multiple subjects. Remove all of the other objects; then you'll know that, for instance, *The sky's the limit for Roger, Sarah, and I* is dead wrong, because you'd never say *The sky's the limit for I.* When you've got a multiple objects of a preposition or verb, remove all objects but the pronoun. Then select the pronoun case that sounds right.

- *Who* and *whom* provide a special challenge: Although they're always used as singular subjects or objects, our ear doesn't always help us choose the correct case, at least not in examples like *Who/whom did you invite*? *Who* is wrong, but it doesn't "sound" wrong. Still, you can help your ear if you (1) answer the question (i.e., put the question in the form of an answer) and (2) substitute the pronouns *he* (nominative) and *him* (objective) for *who* and *whom*: *Who/whom did you invite*? becomes *You invited who/whom* and then *You invited he/him*. Would you say *You invited he*? Of course not! You'd use *him*. So *whom* should be used in *Whom did you invite*?

Think About It

- Which of your pronouns need revision to better replace their antecedents?
- Where can you polish your sentences to use personal pronoun cases correctly?
- What "tests" will help you determine whether you're using objective and nominative pronouns correctly?

Always know what noun your pronoun stands for, and don't let pronoun cases intimidate you. Take charge of them, either by their cases, performing some simple tests, or relying on your ear.

Demonstrative, Relative, Reflexive, and Indefinite Pronouns

Chapter 5: Section 1, Lesson 3

Personal pronouns aren't the only pronouns. There are also demonstrative pronouns, relative pronouns, reflexive pronouns, and indefinite pronouns. Understanding how these words function is key to using them effectively.

Demonstrative Pronouns

Demonstratives are pointers. They're words that can act as pronouns or as determiners—adjectives that point to specific things. They include

- that
- this
- such
- these
- those

If you say *These driving gloves are too tight,* you're using *these* as an adjective, describing the driving gloves. If you say *These are too tight,* you're using *these* as a pronoun: The noun they refer to (driving gloves) isn't present in the sentence, so if you're using the pronoun in written form, the driving gloves must have been mentioned in the previous sentence. If you're using the pronoun in speech, you can simply point to the driving gloves when you refer to them as *these.*

As with personal pronouns, demonstrative pronouns must always have clear antecedents. Compare these two passages:

- *Some hobbyists are flying drones over the wildfire area. This grounds helicopters, preventing them from dropping water on the fire.* Here, the antecedent of *this* is the entire previous sentence—the fact of hobbyists flying drones. It's perfectly clear what *this* is.
- *Common components of a fun picnic are hot dogs, beer, and bowls of potato salad. However, these can cause food poisoning.* Here, the antecedent of *these* is not clear. Probably the writer means that the bowls of potato salad can be dangerous, but the reader cannot be sure.

Relative Pronouns

Relative pronouns select from *groups* of nouns or pronouns. They include the personal pronouns *who, whoever, and whomever,* as well as *what, whatever, which, whichever,* and *that.* (Note that only the personal pronouns have cases.) Relative pronouns ending in *ever* are called *indefinite relative pronouns* since their antecedents are not definite. *What* can also be an indefinite relative pronoun. Examples:

- **Whoever** *swiped my brownies is in big trouble.*
- *The thief obviously isn't worrying about* **what** *the kids are going to eat at the picnic.*

The relative pronouns *which* and *that* are often used as the subjects of relative clauses—clauses which act as adjectives, describing nouns or pronouns. Although these two relative pronouns are sometimes used interchangeably, they actually have distinct uses:

- *Which* is used when the relative clause is nonrestrictive (also called nonessential). Nonrestrictive clauses are not, strictly speaking, necessary to the overall meaning of the sentence—they could be removed from the sentence without injuring its basic meaning.
- *That* is used when the relative clause is restrictive (i.e., essential). A restrictive relative clause is necessary to the overall meaning of the sentence.

Consider these examples:

- *The magenta driving gloves, which were an expensive Christmas gift from my aunt, are very*

uncomfortable. Here, if you remove the nonrestrictive clause, you get *The magenta driving gloves are very uncomfortable*. This information conveys the basic meaning of the original sentence—it's missing an interesting detail, but the detail isn't essential.

- *In fact, any gift that I get from my aunt is likely to be useless.* Here, if you remove the defining clause, you get *In fact, any gift is likely to be useless.* Obviously, the meaning of this sentence is quite different from that of the original. The clause conveys important information and is therefore essential.

Reflexive Pronouns
These are personal pronouns in the sense that they're formed by adding *self* or *selves* to the personal pronouns *my, your, him, her, it, our,* and *them. Myself, yourself* (when *you* is singular), *himself, herself,* and *itself* are all singular; *ourselves, yourselves* (when *you* is plural), and *themselves* are plural.

You should use reflexive pronouns when the subject of the clause is both actor and acted-upon—both subject and object. The number of the reflexive pronoun must match the number of its pronoun.

- *We must not fool ourselves.*
- *The poodle regarded herself balefully in the mirror.*

You also use reflexive pronouns as intensifiers—to call the reader's attention to the identity of the noun or pronoun.

- *I myself have made that very same mistake countless times.*
- *We ourselves are responsible for the current state of this community.*

Reflexive pronouns are never used by themselves: They must always be preceded in the sentence by the noun or pronoun for which they stand. (For example, in the previous sentence, *themselves* refers to *reflexive pronouns.*) *John, Frank, and myself each bought a movie ticket* is incorrect because *myself* doesn't "reflect" anything in the sentence. It should read *John, Frank, and I each bought a movie ticket.*

Indefinite Pronouns
Finally, many pronouns have no antecedents at all, whether explicit or implicit. These are called indefinite pronouns. Essentially, these pronouns function as nouns: They stand for themselves, for people, things, or groups whose identity isn't known. There are two categories of indefinite pronouns:

- Those whose antecedents are up for grabs. These include *anybody, anything, anyone, everybody, everything, everyone, somebody, something, someone, nobody, no one, none,* and *nothing.*
- Those whose antecedents can be deduced in context. These may include *all, another, other, any, both, each, either, few, many, neither, one, some,* and *several.*

The only difficulty presented by indefinite pronouns is determining whether the pronoun is singular or plural (because when the pronoun is the subject of a clause it must match its verb in number). The following are singular indefinite pronouns:

- any
- anyone
- anybody
- anything
- everybody
- everyone
- everything
- each
- nobody
- somebody

- someone

Everybody, *everyone*, and *everything* may seem plural, but they're not. The prefix *every* in these words means *each*, and *each* is always singular.

—and here are some plural indefinite pronouns:

- all
- many
- others
- none
- several
- some

None can be singular or plural. If you say *None of the cantaloupe has been eaten, none* means *not one part*, and it's singular; if you say *None of the fire ants were discovered, none* means *not any*, and it's plural.

Think About It

- What (or whom) is your demonstrative pronoun pointing at?
- Which of your sentences need *that* for nonrestrictive clauses and *which* for restrictive clauses?
- Where can reflexive pronouns help intensify the meaning you want to convey?
- What verbs should be revised based on whether your indefinite pronoun is plural or singular?

Knowing the different types of pronouns and when and how to use them brings flexibility to your writing. With demonstrative, relative, reflexive, and indefinite pronouns, you'll be able to polish pronoun usage and add details or emphasis in spots that might otherwise seem too simple.

Verbs

Chapter 5: Section 1, Lesson 4

In every sentence, something either happens or simply *is.* All clauses, whether dependent or independent, contain a subject and a predicate. The verb is the heart of the predicate: It denotes the action or state of being of a clause. To see more on these distinctions, refer to [Subjects](#) and [Predicates](#).

In any clause or full sentence, verbs do the lion's share of the work, and there is a great variety of work they might do. Verbs allow you to ask questions, make statements, or give commands. They let you convey complex relationships between the subject and predicate, communicate about events and circumstances in the past, the present, and the future, and even indicate what happened in which order within a sentence. (For instance, perfect tenses allow you to write a sentence like *I looked out the window and saw that a gopher had eaten all of my irises,* conveying that the gopher destroyed your garden *before* you looked out your window.) For these reasons—and more—you should understand the great variety of verb forms and their uses. In addition to the following discussion, see [Irregular Verbs](#), [Helping Verbs](#), [Active and Passive Voice](#), and [Verb Tenses](#).

Action Verbs
Verbs of action can be transitive or intransitive.

- Transitive verbs take direct objects.
  - *Shirley **robbed** her piggy bank.* (*Piggy bank* is the direct object of the verb *robbed*.)
  - *A successful outcome **requires** forethought.* (*Forethought* is the direct object of *requires*.)
- Intransitive verbs do not take direct objects.
  - *Shirley's stomach **ached**.* (The verb *ached* is intransitive, so it's complete without anything else; it doesn't need a direct object.)
  - *Shirley **complained** that she had lost her purse.* (The clause *that she had lost her purse* is adverbial: It modifies the verb *complained* telling **why** she complained.)
  - *She **arose** the next day determined never to make the same mistake.* (The phrase *determined never to make the same mistake* is also adverbial: It modifies the verb *arose,* telling **how** she arose.)

To see more on transitive and intransitive verbs, refer to [Predicates](#).

Linking Verbs
Linking verbs convey states of being. The most commonly used verb of being is the verb *to be*:

- *Shirley **was** ashamed of herself.*
- *From now on, she **will be** careful to treat her savings with more respect.*
- *She **is** president of the Safe Savings Club.*

Still, there are many other "being" or "circumstance" verbs. Like *to be*, they link the subject to its complement—the part of the sentence that completes the thought. Some other linking verbs include

- State of being verbs: *to become, to seem, to appear, to remain;* also (when used intransitively) *to grow, to turn, to prove.*
  - *When Maisie saw dry kibbles in her bowl, she **turned** sulky.*
  - *(Finding food she likes always **proves** difficult.)*
  - *She **has grown** quite thin lately.*
  - *What **will become** of her?*
- Sensory verbs (when used intransitively): *to smell, to taste, to look, to feel, to sound.*
  - *Your bouillabaisse **smells** heavenly!*
  - *Still, it does not **taste** quite right.*
  - *In fact, some of your guests **look** ill.*

o   *The lady to my right just said she **feels** dizzy.*
o   *In fact, I thought your recipe **sounded** risky.*

To learn more about these types of verbs, see [Being and Linking Verbs](#).

Helping (Auxiliary) Verbs
Helping verbs are used with main verbs in order to convey sequences of time and overlays of mood. They include *will, shall, may, might, can, could, must, ought to, should, would, used to, need to,* as well as the verb *to do.* They're used with the base form of the main verb. For example,

- *You **will** remember this day forever. Will* helps the verb *to remember* form the future tense.
- ***Do** you remember your PIN for this bank? Do* helps the verb *to remember* form a question.

For more ideas about using these types of verbs in your writing, see [Helping Verbs](#).

Phrasal Verbs
Phrasal verbs are made up of a verb and another word or words, most often a preposition. The entire "phrase" functions as a single verb because each phrase takes on a different meaning. *To blow up* means *to explode*, but *to blow*, all by itself, doesn't have this meaning. *To blow over* means to pass by, another meaning again. In the following examples—which are just a few of many English phrasal verbs—take note of how the phrase changes the meaning of the verb:

- *to give in*
- *to give away*
- *to give out*
- *to give back*
- *to hang on*
- *to hang up*
- *to turn up*
- *to turn down*
- *to turn off*
- *to turn out*

There are no "rules" for the formation of phrasal verbs. A good dictionary will include definitions for phrasal verbs.

Conditional Verbs
Conditional verbs are used to make sentences about hypothetical or not-yet-actual acts and circumstances. Conditional sentences usually begin with *if*, but not all *if* sentences are conditional. Compare the following examples:

- *If anybody leaves food on the table, my basset hound is all over it.*
- *When Jack was a baby, if I turned my back for a minute, the basset always licked Jack's bowl.*

Both sentences are factual, not hypothetical, so the conditional isn't used; they just use the regular present and past tenses. If a sentence uses the future tense, it's necessarily conditional (since the future hasn't happened yet):

- *As long as he's alive, that dog will steal our food.*

Note that it's hypothetical, but also "factual" in the sense that the sentence is making a claim about a future fact.

Conditional sentences get interesting—and tricky—when they deal with hypothetical situations. The hypothetical circumstance or action might happen, and it might not. It's outside the realm of the

factual. To see more examples of these verbs, check out [Conditional Verb Tenses](#).

Moods
Because speakers and writers have moods, verbs have moods: attitudes toward what is being conveyed in the sentence. There are four moods in English:

- **Indicative Mood:** The indicative mood is used to make a statement. Most sentences are statements: *My dog eats too much.*
- **Interrogative Mood:** The interrogative is used to ask a question: *How can I get him to stop?*
- **Imperative Mood:** This mood is used to make commands. Since the (unspoken, unwritten) subject of a command is always **you**, the verb must be in the second person: *Bowser, don't even think about touching that sandwich!*
- **Subjunctive Mood:** The subjunctive mood is used in dependent clauses to
  - express a wish: *I wish **my dog played more and ate less.***
  - express a hypothetical: ***If he cut back on the kibble**, he would lose weight.*
  - express a request or demand: *I ask **that you be on time in the morning**.*

In the past tense, the subjunctive uses exactly the same form as the indicative, with one exception: When using the verb *to be* in the subjunctive past tense, you must use *were*.

- *My husband wished I **spent** less time reading.*
- *If I **were** rich, I would buy a ranch.*

In the present tense, the subjunctive uses the base form of the verb.

- *I demand you **be** prepared for tomorrow's base jump.*
- *The pamphlet suggests we **leave** early in the morning.*

Think About It

- Which of your verbs need direct objects or other modifiers?
- Where will helping verbs complete your clauses?
- What phrasal verbs have just the right meaning for your sentences?
- Where will indicative, interrogative, imperative, or subjunctive sentences add variety or style to your writing?

Verb formation is complicated, but for a good reason: In order to communicate clearly, you must be precise about time (tense) and distinguish between real and imagined circumstances. Learning how to use verbs precisely will strengthen your writing.

Adjectives

Chapter 5: Section 1, Lesson 5

If you think about it, you're asked to describe things all the time: What did you think of the movie? What was your childhood like? How would your dream house look? What is your most memorable experience? And there's a good chance that adjectives are key words in your descriptions.
An *adjective* is a word that describes or modifies a noun or a pronoun:

- *The movie was **terrible**.*
- *My childhood was **difficult** but shaped me into a **strong** person.*
- *My **dream** home would be a **Victorian** mansion on the shore of a **clear** lake.*
- *Hiking the **steep**, **snowy** trail of Mt. Kilimanjaro is my most **memorable** experience.*

Using Adjectives
Adjectives can be used either after a linking verb or before the noun or pronoun they describe:

- *The movie was **terrible**.*
- *That was a **terrible** movie.*

Often, writers will combine multiple descriptions and create a compound adjective. In these cases, the compound adjective is hyphenated when it comes before the word it describes, but it isn't hyphenated when it comes after a linking verb:

- *The **bone-chilling** cold crept into the tent late that night.*
- *Late that night, the cold in the tent became **bone chilling**.*

As you can see, adjectives help you add extra information about your topic, showing readers how something looked or felt. You can identify adjectives in sentences by first finding the nouns or pronouns. Then you can ask whether other words are used to describe those nouns or pronouns.

Adjective Clauses
While a clause is any group of words that has a subject and verb, an *adjective clause* is a clause that functions as an adjective—describing a noun or pronoun. Unlike regular adjectives, adjective clauses follow the word they refer to:

*The actor, **who chose not to be in the sequel**, was happy about the movie's failure.*

The clause *who chose not to be in the sequel* functions as an adjective describing *actor*.

*My childhood, **which I spent in a remote part of Vermont**, was difficult.*

The clause *which I spent in a remote part of Vermont* functions as an adjective describing *childhood*.

*I saw the house **that I have always wanted**.*

Here, the clause *that I have always wanted* describes the noun *house*.

As you've noticed, adjective clauses are often introduced by particular pronouns, including *who, whom, whose, which*, and *that.* See [Demonstrative, Relative, Reflexive, and Indefinite Pronouns](#) for more information on using pronouns with your adjectives.You don't always need a pronoun, though. Your writing might sound a little less formal, but you can include adjective clauses in your sentences without the pronouns:

- *My childhood, **spent in a remote part of Vermont,** was difficult.*

- *I saw the house **I have always wanted**.*

For more on using adjective clauses in your writing, see [Dependent Clauses](#).

Avoiding Repetition with Adjective Clauses
Adjective clauses can increase the complexity of your sentences, but beware of several common mistakes. When using adjective clauses, don't repeat elements of your sentences, as these examples do:

*The house **that** I grew up in **it** was white.*

That and *it* both refer to *house*, so *it* isn't needed.

*The movie I saw last weekend **it** was terrible.*

I saw last weekend is an adjective clause referring to *movie*, so the word *it* is not needed, as *it* also refers to *movie*.

Punctuating Adjective Clauses
Adjective clauses can be essential or nonessential clauses, also called restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses. An essential clause is one that is needed to give necessary information about the noun it refers to, so it does *not* take commas. Here's an example:

*The man **who climbed Mt Kilimanjaro** complained about the horrible movie choices.*

The sentence *The man complained about the horrible movie choices* wouldn't be very clear because no one would know which man you meant. With the essential adjective clause *who climbed Mt Kilimanjaro,* readers can tell which man was complaining. Notice there are no commas setting the essential adjective clause apart from the rest of the sentence.

Nonessential clauses are different. They give information that may be interesting and useful, but they're not needed to convey the sentence's meaning. People will understand the sentence with or without a nonessential clause. These clauses are set off with commas, as in this example:

*Fred, **who climbed Mt Kilimanjaro,** complained about the horrible movie choices.*

You can tell who the man is (Fred), so the adjective clause just gives extra information about him—it's not essential. The commas on each side set it apart. Think of them like parentheses surrounding an interesting, but not essential, part of the sentence. To see more on punctuating essential and nonessential clauses, refer to [Commas](#).

Misplaced Modifiers
Modifiers are words, phrases, or clauses that modify (describe) another word. Adjectives, adjective phrases, and adjective clauses are all modifiers, but watch out for misplaced modifiers, which create confusing, illogical sentences. Check this out:

*The travelers saw a statue on the hill **made of chocolate**.*

Here, it's not clear whether the statue or the hill is made of chocolate. The meaning is clearer this way:

*The travelers saw a statue **made of chocolate** on the hill.*

Here's another example:

***Covered in frosting and sprinkles**, I enjoyed the fresh donut.*

The adjective phrase (modifier) makes it sound like *I* am coated with frosting and sprinkles rather than the donut. That's a misplaced modifier. It sounds clearer this way:

*I enjoyed the fresh donut **covered in frosting and sprinkles.***

The best place for a modifier is right next to the word it modifies. When the modifier is misplaced, confusion ensues:

Patricia wore her nicest dress to the interview, which was covered in frosting and sprinkles.

Since an interview can't very well be covered in frosting and sprinkles, the dress must be messy. Make it clearer this way:

Patricia wore her nicest dress, which was covered in frosting and sprinkles, to the interview.

Think About It

- What people, places, things, and ideas in your essay could use more description?
- Where could you include adjective clauses to increase the complexity of your writing?
- Looking closer at your writing, where do you need hyphens or commas to clarify your compound adjectives or adjective clauses?

Adjectives and adjective clauses add more detail to your writing, while applying the conventions makes your meaning clearer.

Adverbs

Chapter 5: Section 1, Lesson 6

Adverbs have their own personalities. In fact, they can be quite the divas, especially in the way they demand commas from time to time. They will work for you on their terms, used only when the words they modify do not adequately express the meaning you want to convey. Like all parts of speech, an adverb may be a single word (*majestically*) or a string of words (*with utmost majesty*). Adverbs, adverb phrases, and adverb clauses modify verbs, adjectives, and adverbs.

Regular Adverbs
An adverb is the part of speech which modifies (describes) a verb, an adjective, or another adverb. Most adverbs are formed by adding *-ly* or *-ily* to an adjective (as in *happily, mightily, awfully, skeptically, wildly*). Be careful, though. Not all modifiers ending in *-ly* are adverbs: some *-ly* adjectives include *friendly, lively, lovely,* and *silly.*

Irregular Adverbs
You'll also find adverbs that do not end in *-ly*, including common words like *well* (the adverb form of the adjective *good*) *very*, and *quite*. Many irregular adverbs also function as adjectives:

- *fast*
- *late*
- *straight*
- *hard*
- *low*
- *long*
- *far*

For example, in the phrase *straight line*, *straight* is an adjective describing the noun *line.* In *He ran straight into the wall*, *straight* is an adverb, describing the verb *ran.* If you're not sure what part of speech a word is (many words can function as more than one part of speech), any good dictionary will include that information in the listing for that word.

Functions of Adverbs of Manner
These types of adverbs answer the question *How?* and are usually used with action verbs.

- *Marcie smiles warmly, but Darcie smiles menacingly*. (The women are smiling in very different ways. The smiles are distinctive because very different adverbs of manner are used to describe the action of smiling.)
- *Marcie drives **fast** but Darcie drives **like a NASCAR wannabe***. (Remember that you can use a phrase or clause as a modifier, too. Both *fast* and *like a NASCAR wannabe* are adverbs of manner describing how the women drive.)

Adverbs of Place
These adverbs answer the question *Where?* and are usually used with verbs (whether of action or of being). Adverbs of place tend to be irregular:

- *You must park the car **here**.*
- *My dog just ran **outside**.*
- *I looked **everywhere** for her.*
- *She was running **all over the place**.*

Adverbs of Time
Like adverbs of place, adverbs of time usually modify verbs and tend to be irregular. They answer the question *When?*

- *I want my breakfast **now**!*

- *My guests arrived **early**.*
- ***Sometimes** I watch junk TV.*
- *The worst shows are on **daily**.*
- *I record them **when I can't watch them live**.*

Adverbs of Purpose

Use adverbs of purpose to answer the question *Why?* Answering *why* is much more complicated than answering *where*, *when*, and *how*, so an adverb of purpose is always a phrase rather than a single word:

- *Hermione went to the store **to buy a frozen dinner**.*
- ***To avoid being caught by her mother-in-law**, she went out the back door.*

Intensifying Adverbs

These adverbs are also known as adverbs of degree. They indicate the degree or extent to which something happens and answer the question *How much?* They can modify verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. There are three kinds of intensifying adverbs:

- Emphasizing adverbs, as in *The basset I have now **really** keeps me busy because he **simply** eats me out of house and home*.
- Amplifying adverbs, as in *I **absolutely** refuse to get another dog. I love him **so well**, but he keeps me **completely** broke*.
- Downsizing adverbs, as in *I **sort of** dislike Halloween because I **almost** always run out of candy.*

Sometimes writers add an intensifying adverb because they aren't confident about other word choices or they're not ready to trust readers to pay close attention. Writers can helicopter like anxious parents over each sentence; they can't resist adding intensifiers just to make sure readers get the full meaning. Since adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs, you can avoid helicoptering if you choose those verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs wisely. Compare these two sentences:

- *When he saw the extremely ugly spider, Herbert turned really pale and ran quickly away.*
- *When he saw the hideous spider, Herbert blanched and sprinted away.*

If you're satisfied with your choice of verb or modifier but still tempted to use an intensifier, stop and ask yourself if the added word changes the meaning of your sentence. Once in a while, it will. For instance, if you want to emphasize a contrast to be sure readers notice it, you might say

*Sally believed Fred would find her attractive if she just lost ten pounds. **Actually,** Fred thought she was **perfectly** beautiful.*

Here the intensifiers add emphasis rather than mere verbiage: *Actually* transitions between sentences, and *perfectly* highlights Fred's opinion that Sally isn't just beautiful—she's perfect just as she is.

Still, most sentences don't benefit from the addition of intensifying adverbs. If *The brand-new homeowners adored their house*, your readers will assume that they did so *truly, really, and absolutely*. If *They left their twelve-year-old twins alone in the house for the weekend*, writing that they did so *irresponsibly* will not increase reader outrage. What responsible parent would do this? Stop helicoptering!

Adverbs Include Phrases and Clauses

A prepositional phrase can be (and usually is) an adverb. For example, in *I love to roast beets in the oven,* the phrase *in the oven* is an adverb, telling *where* I love to roast beets.

A clause can be an adverb. For instance, *When I roast fresh yellow beets, the aroma is earthy and enticing.* The clause "when I roast fresh yellow beets" is an adverb, telling *when* the aroma is so earthy

and enticing.

Placement of Adverbs
Occasionally, adverbs get lost or misplaced within a sentence. Check out the different meanings created when the adverb *almost* is moved in these sentences:

- *I almost passed all of my classes!*
- *I passed almost all of my classes!*

In the first sentence, the student failed every class—but he *almost passed* them.

In the second sentence, he passed most of his classes, but not all of them—just *almost all* of them. As with adjective modifiers, placing the adverb close to the word it's meant to describe makes your meaning clearer.

Think About It

- Where do you need to describe *how*, *why*, *where*, or *when* something is done?
- What adverbs do you need to add to modify a word?
- Which modifiers could you omit to avoid helicoptering?
- Which modifiers might be referring to the wrong word or in the wrong location within your sentence?

Depending on the question you need to answer—*how*, *where*, *when*, or *why*—a properly placed adverb will emphasize ideas effectively. However, use them cautiously. Intensifying adverbs can get out of hand, so use only what's needed.

Prepositions

Chapter 5: Section 1, Lesson 7

If a friend asked you where his keys were, you might reply, "You put your keys *in your pocket*" or "I saw your keys *on your desk.*" In each sentence, the most detailed information about the missing keys' location is found in a prepositional phrase–*in your pocket* and *on your desk.* In fact, if you left these phrases out of your answers ("You put your keys." "I saw your keys."), your friend would likely be confused and frustrated, not to mention locked out of his office, car, or house for quite a while.

As this scenario demonstrates, prepositions (like *in* and *on*) and the prepositional phrases that they introduce help you create clear, descriptive statements. By including prepositional phrases in your writing, you can make your compositions engaging, share essential ideas with a target audience, and keep your reader from having a confused reaction similar to that of your friend with the missing keys.

Prepositions

A *preposition* is a word that connects a noun or pronoun to another word to show their relationship in a sentence. In their simplest use, prepositions demonstrate relationships such as *place* (where something is), *time* (when something occurs), or *direction* (where something is going). Look, for instance, at the bolded words in the following statements:

- *Jill needs the book **beside** the blue chair.*
- *The exam **before** lunch will be the most difficult.*
- *The dog is walking **toward** a rickety bridge.*

The highlighted prepositions create links that enable readers to comprehend the relationships between the book and the chair (*place*), the exam and lunch (*time*), and the dog's walking action and the bridge (*direction*). Changing a preposition changes the relationship between the words that it connects and, as a result, the meaning of the sentence:

- *Jill needs the book **beside** the blue chair.*
- *Jill needs the book **under** the blue chair.*

Clearly, the person retrieving Jill's book will need to look in a different location if he or she reads the second sentence instead of the first.

Prepositional Phrases

A preposition is followed by a noun or pronoun, which is called the *object* of the preposition. This object brings full meaning to the idea started by the preposition. For instance, seeing the words *beside* or *under,* a reader might think, "*beside* what?" or "*under* what?" The preposition's object provides the answer.

Together, the preposition, its object, and any modifiers of that object form a structure called a *prepositional phrase*. Examine, again, this statement about Jill's book:

*Jill needs the book **beside** the blue chair.*

Here, the preposition *beside* is followed by its object, *chair*. The noun *chair* is modified by the article *the* and the adjective *blue.* Together, these four words form a single unit of meaning–a prepositional phrase identifying which book Jill needs.

Because "beside the blue chair" describes *book,* a noun, this prepositional phrase functions as an *adjective* in this sentence. Prepositional phrases, however, can also function as *adverbs* that modify verbs and describe where, when, or how an action occurred:

- *Luca walked **down** the old gravel road.* Here, *down the old gravel road* modifies the verb *walked* by describing *where* Luca walked. *Down* is the preposition, and *road* is its object.

- **After** the baseball game, I will drive home. Here, *after the baseball game* modifies *will drive* by identifying *when* the writer will drive home. *After* is the preposition, and *game* is its object.
- *I studied* **with** *her.* Here, *with her* modifies *studied* by explaining *how* (or in what situation) the writer studied. *With* is the preposition, and the pronoun *her* is its object.

The key point to remember is that if a preposition is *not* followed by an object, then that word is not acting as a preposition in a sentence. Observe, for instance, the uses of the word *across* in the following passage:

Martin swam **across** *the lake. Then, Riesa paddled her canoe* **across***.*

In the first sentence, *across* is followed by an object, the noun *lake.* Therefore, *across* serves as a preposition, and *across the lake* is a prepositional phrase. In the second sentence, no noun or pronoun follows *across.* In this case, *across* has no object and is not a preposition but an adverb.

Expressions of Place, Time, and Direction
A few rules can guide your use of prepositions to describe relationships of place, time, and direction.

Place		
at	Use *at* to refer to - an address - a small, fixed point	*I live* **at** *1420 Miller Crossroads. Please show your ticket* **at** *the entrance.*
in	Use *in* to refer to - an enclosed space - a large area	*The family rode* **in** *the elevator. The Nile River is located* **in** *Africa.*
on	Use *on* to refer to streets.	*The office is* **on** *Cheever Street.*
Time		
at	Use *at* when you refer to - a specific time of day - the night	*The class eats lunch* **at** *11:45 a.m. Owls hunt* **at** *night.*
in	Use *in* when you refer to a period of time.	*Berenice was born* **in** *1978. Snow melts* **in** *the spring. She runs* **in** *the afternoon.*
on	Use *on* when you refer to days and dates.	*The test is* **on** *Monday. Christmas is* **on** *December 25.*
from	Use *from* when you define a period of time with a specific beginning time or date.	*She will visit England* **from** *Wednesday to Saturday.*
to	Use *to* when you define a period of time with a specific ending time or date.	*The meeting lasted from 2:15* **to** *4:30.*
until	Use *until* when you define a period of time with a specific ending time or date.	*The movie began at 5:20 and lasted* **until** *7:45.*

for	Use *for* to describe the duration of an event over a period of time.	*You must take Algebra **for** two semesters. The dog has been missing **for** some time.*
during	Use *during* to describe the duration of an event over a definite, known period of time.	*He did his homework **during** the bus ride. Churchill was the British prime minister **during** World War II.*
since	Use *since* to describe an action that began in the past and is still continuing.	*Maria and Suzette have been best friends **since** high school.*
Direction		
from	Use *from* when you express movement *away from* a place.	*The flight is leaving **from** Arizona.*
to	Use *to* when you express movement *in the direction of* a place.	*Daljit took the train **to** Pittsburgh.*
toward	Use *toward* when you express movement *in the direction of* a place.	*The hikers walked **toward** the camp.*

Think About It

- What relationships involving place, time, and direction do you need to express in your writing?
- What prepositional phrases can you construct to describe such relationships?
- How does altering the preposition in a prepositional phrase make your meaning more or less precise?

Remember that in the context of the prepositional phrase, prepositions create important connections to link their objects–nouns or pronouns–to other sentence structures. These connections describe key relationships that can enrich your compositions and ensure that your reader understands important ideas that you wish to share.

Articles and Other Determiners

Choosing suitable articles (*a*, *an*, or *the*) and other determiners helps you subtly provide your reader with needed information such as whether you're referring to specific or general things, indicating a lot or a little of something, or designating possession. Consider these sentences:

A owl is hooting from an perch faraway. How much birds are housed at those zoo?

Reading these sentences, you likely get the feeling that something isn't "right" about them—that some of their parts just don't fit together appropriately. Now, look at these sentences:

An owl is hooting from a perch faraway. How many birds are housed at that zoo?

These sentences read more comfortably and clearly because, in front of each noun, the writer has used an appropriate *article* or other *determiner—an, a, many,* or *that*. Even though such words that precede and modify nouns are little and unassuming, using them correctly makes a sentence flow smoothly.

Some General Rules About Article Use

Knowing how to use articles and other determiners means being able to recognize whether the associated noun is considered *count* or *noncount* (or *countable* or *uncountable*). If you are unsure what these terms mean, try reading through [Count and Noncount Nouns](#).

When you are using the three articles—*a, an,* and *the*—you should observe the following rules:

- The indefinite article, *a* or *an,* is used before a singular, countable noun when the noun is first mentioned and introduced to the reader or listener:
  - *We need **a** new car.*
  - *I have **an** apple in my hand.*

- The definite article, *the,* is used when an already mentioned noun is referenced a second time or when the noun clearly represents a particular person, place, or thing:
  - *We need a new car. If possible, **the** car shouldn't cost more than $12,000.*
  - *I have an apple in my hand, but I'm not sure it's **the** apple you want for your pie.*
  - ***The** sky is getting dark.*

Some More Examples of How Articles Are Used

To help you better understand the application of these guidelines about article use, take a look at these sample sentences, each of which is followed by an explanation of the way it uses indefinite and definite articles before its key nouns.

Dr. Hadhazy is a surgeon. She is the surgeon who operated on my sister.

- *Hadhazy:* Except in a few very special cases, a proper noun like a personal name is not introduced with an article.
- *a surgeon:* There are many surgeons in the world; the indefinite article *a* notes that Dr. Hadhazy is an unspecified member of this general group.

- *the surgeon:* Only one surgeon operated on the writer's sister. The word *surgeon* now refers to a particular person, so the writer uses the definite article.
- *my sister:* When a possessive pronoun like *my, his*, or *our* is used before a noun, no article is needed.

The first thing we need is a map.

- *The first thing:* Only one thing can be first, so *thing* refers to a particular item and is preceded by the definite article, *the*.
- *a map:* The sentence doesn't specify what map is needed, so the indefinite article *a* is used.

Most people are afraid of death.

- *Most people:* When a word like *most*, *some*, or *many* is used to modify a noun, no article is needed.
- *death:* As it is used here, *death* is a noncount noun; it takes no article since the noun is referring to death in general.

He will not be able to come because of the recent death of his father.

- *the recent death:* Now, the writer is referring not to death in general but to one particular death; therefore, the definite article, *the,* is used.
- *his father:* No article is needed because *his* precedes the noun.

If you need help, call me, and I'll give you a hand.

- *help: Help* is a noncount noun. Since the writer is not talking about a definite kind of help, no article is used.
- *a hand:* This example is, in a way, the most difficult since the writer is certainly not talking about giving someone an unspecified hand. *To give someone a hand* is an idiom meaning *to help*. Like all idioms, it follows its own rules for article use and must be learned as a special, separate case.

Choosing Between *A* and *An*
Choosing between the two forms of the indefinite article—*a* and *an*—is a matter of pronunciation, or sound. Because English speakers find it difficult to run from one vowel sound to another in two sequential words (for instance, *a egg)*, they insert an extra *n* sound to make the transition easier and more distinct (*an egg)*. When choosing between *a* and *an,* however, don't follow a strict rule of "*a* before consonants and *an* before vowels." To get things right, focus not on the first *letter* of a noun that follows an article but on the first *sound* of that noun. You'll likely find it helpful to apply this rule:

a *before a word beginning with a consonant sound;* ***an*** *before a word beginning with a vowel sound.*

Consider these examples:

- ***a*** *person,* ***a*** *crime,* ***a*** *university,* ***a*** *hospital*
- ***an*** *officer,* ***an*** *incident,* ***an*** *unusual problem,* ***an*** *hour*

In these illustrations, the nouns preceded by *a* begin with consonant sounds. While *university* begins with a vowel (*u*), the initial sound is pronounced as the consonant *y* sound. Similarly, the nouns preceded by *an* begin with vowel sounds. Although *hour* begins with the consonant *h,* that *h* is silent, and the first sound that

you hear is the vowel digraph *ou.*

Other Determiners

The articles *a, an,* and *the* are part of a larger group of words called *determiners*, modifiers that are used before nouns to mark characteristics such as quantity or possession. The following table presents some determiners, grouped according to their use with count/noncount and singular/plural nouns.

Determiners used with all types of nouns:		Determiners used with noncount nouns:	
any	*any water*	*little*	*little noise*
her	*her house*	*much*	*much sugar*
his	*his photographs*		
Mary's	*Mary's intelligence*		
my	*my hat*		
our	*our shoes*		
the	*the furniture*		
their	*their car*		
whose	*whose nutcrackers*		
your	*your motorcycle*		
Determiners used with singular count nouns:		**Determiners used with plural count nouns:**	
a	*a football field*	*few*	*few schools*
an	*an ostrich*	*many*	*many ice cream*
each	*each rug*	*several*	*cones*
either	*either sock*	*these*	*several glasses*
every	*every glass*	*those*	*these computers*
neither	*neither magazine*		*those ideas*
one	*one boy*		
Determiners used with singular count nouns and with noncount nouns:		**Determiners used with plural count nouns and with noncount nouns:**	
that	*that cat*	*enough*	*enough notebooks*
this	*this salt*	*more*	*more compassion*
		most	*most dishes*
		some	*some radioactivity*
		such	*such vegetables*

The Most Important Rules of All

Sometimes, when editing a first draft, even a seasoned writer may find that he or she has used an article or other determiner in an unnatural way. Because article and determiner use can be complicated, honing this skill involves observation and practice over time. For now, try focusing your attention on what is, perhaps, the most important rule to remember about such modifiers:

A singular, countable noun must be preceded by an article or determiner.

In other words, if you know 1) that a noun is countable and 2) that you're using it in its singular form, then you can almost always be sure you need an article or a determiner in front of it. For instance, you can't say *book is intriguing* or *car is broken.* You must say *that book* or *the car*.

Exceptions to this rule lie in the use of idioms—expressions that don't follow the rules but are correct because they are what educated individuals write or say. The

rule says that *car* alone is impossible—that you must say *a car, my car*, or something like that. But the correct idiom for how someone came to work this morning is *He came by car,* not *He came by a car.* This illustration demonstrates an even more important rule to remember about using article and determiners: *idioms always beat rules*.

Think About It

- Which nouns in your writing are both countable and singular and should be preceded by articles or other determiners?
- What articles or determiners can you place before other count or noncount nouns to express ideas about specificity, quantity, or possession?
- Based on what you have seen and heard, in what cases do idiomatic usages trump rules for article and determiner use?

As you continue observing and learning about the use of articles and determiners, considering these questions can help you choose conscientiously among such seemingly tiny words in order to make a big difference in your smooth sentence form and subtle expression.

Conjunctions

Chapter 5: Section 1, Lesson 9

A conjunction brings things together in a sentence. Those things can be single words (nouns, verbs, modifiers, prepositions) or many words (phrases, clauses). Conjunctions live to link—joining things is what they do. Without them, whenever a sentence contained a list, the items in the list would pile up and collide.

There are three kinds of conjunctions: **coordinating**, **subordinating**, and **correlative**. Each of these types of conjunctions joins words in a different way. If you think of a sentence as a train, then the conjunctions are the couplers, and different sorts of couplers are required for different sorts of cars.

Coordinating Conjunctions
The most common conjunctions are coordinating conjunctions, often combined into the acronym FANBOYS (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet,* and *so*). Coordinating conjunctions connect similar things—like cars of identical shape. For additional tips on using coordinating conjunctions, see Top 10 Writing Concerns. Consider these examples:

- Connect independent clauses with a comma + FANBOYS:
    - *Myrtle loves lasagna,* **but** *her husband hates all forms of pasta*.

- Connect grammatical pairs with FANBOYS:
    - *Myrtle loves lasagna* **and** *hates cooking for her finicky husband.* (A pair of predicates)
    - *Myrtle's husband, Yoshi, craves only sushi* **and** *shrimp tempura.* (A pair of nouns)
    - *Myrtle* **and** *Yoshi may be headed for divorce court.* (A pair of nouns)

- Connect the two items in a list of three or more with *and*, *nor*, or *or*:
    - *Myrtle's children are Molly, Polly,* **and** *Raleigh.*
    - *Molly likes lasagna, Polly prefers sushi,* **and** *Raleigh is on a hunger strike.*

- The most commonly used coordinating conjunctions are BOAS (But Or And So):
    - *Myrtle* **and** *Yoshi once loved each other,* **but** *food has driven a wedge between them.*
    - *They must agree to disagree* **or** *to compromise.*

- *Yet* is not used as often as BOAS. Like *but*, *yet* conveys contrast, but *yet* is a bit stronger:
    - *Yoshi loathes Italian food* **but** *tolerates the Greek cuisine.* [This is a simple contrast between food tolerated and food loathed.]
    - *Yoshi loathes pasta* **yet** *loves gelato.* [This doesn't just contrast food loathed and loved; it also implies that loving gelato is surprising, given that Yoshi usually hates Italian food.]

- *Nor* is a coordinating conjunction that appears with another negative, such as *not* or *no*:
    - *Yoshi will not eat pizza,* **nor** *will he allow his children to order any.*

- *Nor* is often used as part of the correlative conjunction *Neither… nor*:
    - *Yoshi* **neither** *loves* **nor** *hates Mexican foods.*

- Finally, there's *for*. *For* is very common—when used as a preposition (e.g., *Myrtle lives* **for** *her children. When they were infants, she rocked them* **for** *hours*). It's less common as a coordinating conjunction, but when it's used as a conjunction, it means *because*.
    - *Myrtle and Yoshi decided to go on a liquid diet,* **for** *years of fighting about food had made them both obese.*

You'll more often see *because* or *since* instead of *for*. *Because* and *since* are subordinating conjunctions, and using them will change the structure of the entire sentence. Because subordinating

conjunctions create dependent (not independent) clauses, you'll need to be aware of when and where to include a comma, as discussed next.

Subordinating Conjunctions
While coordinating conjunctions connected similar cars on the train, subordinating conjunctions connect cars of different shapes and functions. These conjunctions appear at the start of subordinate (dependent) clauses, and they connect those clauses to the rest of the sentence.

Most subordinate conjunctions introduce **adverbial clauses**—dependent clauses whose function is to describe a verb, adjective, or adverb in a nearby clause. Like all adverbs, these clauses are concerned with *when, why, how*, and *where*, and different subordinating conjunctions are used for each of these functions.

- The WHY subordinating conjunctions and conjunctive phrases are *because, since, as, in order that, so that*
  - *Yoshi has begun to eat his main meal at the office* **because** *he's so tired of Myrtle's lasagna.*

- The WHEN: *after, before, once, till, until, when, since, whenever, while, as long as, now that*
  - **Whenever** *she serves him a three-inch cube of lasagna, his eyes glaze over.*

- The WHERE: *where, wherever, whence*
  - *Myrtle dreams of owning a restaurant* **where** *she can serve one hundred distinct pasta dishes.*

- The HOW (including contrast and hypotheticals): *however, although, though, if, as if, even if, lest, supposing, unless, as much as, as though, no matter, provided that, rather than*
  - *During their last argument, Yoshi vowed to move into the basement* **if** *Myrtle refused even to try preparing shrimp tempura.*

One subordinating conjunction introduces a **noun clause**: *that*. When *that* is used as a subordinating conjunction (rather than as a pronoun, as in *That was unacceptable!*), it can be omitted, as in these sentences:

- *Myrtle's greatest flaw is that she always has to be perfect.*
- *Myrtle's greatest flaw is she always has to be perfect.*

However can be used as both a subordinating conjunction AND as a transitional adverb, but you can recognize the different usage:

Myrtle vowed to please Yoshi's palate however she could. [Here, *however* joins the dependent clause *she could* to the rest of the sentence. It's used as a subordinating conjunction.]

Polly is a gourmet chef. However, she does not know how to make a grilled cheese sandwich. [*However* is a transitional adverb here.]

Correlative Conjunctions
Correlative conjunctions work in pairs to join similar items. Correlative conjunctions include

Either . . . or . . .	Both . . . and . . .
Neither . . . nor . . .	As . . . as . . .
Whether . . . or . . .	Not only . . . but also . . .

Note that—with one exception—the second of each pair is a coordinating conjunction (*or, and, nor, but*). You can use the coordinating conjunctions on their own, but **when you use correlatives (*either, both, neither, whether*), you must also use the coordinating conjunctions.** In the

following examples, correlatives can be seen to join freight cars of identical shape:

- *Yoshi put down his fork and said, "**Either** your so-called 'Vermicelli Surprise' goes, **or** I go."*
- *Myrtle said, "**Both** you **and** your stupid uncooked mackerel can get lost."*
- *Yoshi had **neither** anticipated this response **nor** given real thought to where he would go. He was as stunned as he was chagrinned by this sudden turn of events.*
- *For her part, Myrtle was **not only** triumphant **but also** suddenly despondent.*
- ***Whether** he left now **or** later, she would miss him terribly—**not only** for his once unending patience, **but also** for the sweet way he whistled when he tied his shoes.*

Correlative conjunctions must connect the same kinds of things; in other words, the sentence's structure must be parallel. The following example shows a parallel structure error:

- *Myrtle had **not only** played her cards unwisely, **but also** she had done so in front of the kids.*

This sentence joins a predicate to an independent clause. Here's one way to revise:

- *Myrtle had **not only** played her cards unwisely **but also** done so in front of the kids.*

Now both things being joined are predicates. To see more examples and explanation on parallelism, check out Parallel Structure.

Think About It

- How will you know what kind of punctuation to use as you connect different kinds of sentences?
- When are commas needed with coordinating conjunctions?
- What should you look for when using correlative conjunctions?

Sentence connections and punctuation can all seem a bit arbitrary at first, but breaking down the types of conjunctions and the rules that apply to each can make them much more manageable.

Subjects

Chapter 5: Section 2, Lesson 1

A clause is a group of words that include a subject and a predicate. The subject of a clause is the person, place, thing, or idea that the clause is about; in that clause, the subject is either *doing* something or *being* something. The subject is in the spotlight of the clause. Correctly choosing the subject of your clause is an important part of grammatical correctness since you can't be sure if your subject and verb agree in number unless you can identify your subject.

Nouns, Pronouns, Phrases, and Clauses

Modifiers (adverbs and adjectives) and verbs cannot be subjects. Subjects are always nouns or other words or groups of words which function as nouns, such as the following examples:

- Noun: *My older **cat** loves canned salmon.*
- Nouns: ***Fluffy and Maisie** turn their noses up at beef jerky*.
- Pronoun: ***They** insist on an all-fish diet.*
- Noun phrase: ***Yowling incessantly** is their preferred strategy for getting fed*.
- Noun phrase: ***To be fed promptly at 5:00** is their uncompromising demand.*
- Noun phrase: ***Cats running the household** is hardly an ideal situation.*
- Noun clause: ***What I know about cat psychology** could be written on an index card*. [The noun clause, being a clause, has a subject (*I*) and a verb (*know*).]

Finding the Subject

Since the subject is the person, place, thing, or idea that's either doing or being, in order to know the subject, you must figure out what's doing or being. In other words, when you identify the action or circumstance the clause is about, you can easily locate the subject. In the above examples, in order,

- the action is *loves canned salmon*. Who or what loves canned salmon? My cat! So *cat* is the subject.
- the action is *turn their noses up*. Who did that? *Fluffy and Maisie*.
- the action is *insist*. Who insists? *They* do.
- the state of being is *is their preferred strategy*. What is their preferred strategy? *Yowling incessantly*.

 . . . and so on. Once you identify the predicate, its subject reveals itself.

Invisible Subjects

When a sentence is a command, its subject is always *you*, and its subject is rarely expressed, as in this example:

- *Leave that fish alone*! (This means, ***You**! leave that fish alone! The subject is *you*; the predicate is *leave that fish alone*.)

This structure is often referred to as the understood you, which is discussed more in [Sentence Types](#).

Passive Voice Subjects

In the above examples, the subjects are all agents—they helm their clauses. But this isn't always the case. In a passive voice construction, the subject is acted upon rather than acting, so it's not at the helm of the clause—but it's still in the spotlight. It's still what the clause is about, as in the following examples:

- ***I** am ruled by my cats*.
- *Their **edicts** are never ignored*.

Note that these sentences are still about *I* and *edicts*, even though these subjects are acted upon

rather than acting. For more information, see [Active and Passive Voice](#).

Subjects Following Introductory Passages
While the subject often occurs at the start of a sentence (as the subjects in the above examples do), they may just as often follow introductory material—transitions, introductory phrases, introductory clauses:

- *After I fed Maisie last night,* **she** *fell asleep on top of the TV.*
- *Later,* **she** *woke up and demanded a late-night snack.*

Note that even though the introductory material adds to the sentence, its function is descriptive. The heart of the sentence follows the introductory passage: The subject occurs at or near the beginning of the sentence's heart.

Subjects in Inverted Sentences
In most clauses, including all of the above examples, the subject precedes the verb, but that isn't always the case. The verb may come first when

- The sentence is a question: *Have* **you** *fed Maisie yet?* Part of the verb, *have fed*, begins the question.
- The sentence is an expletive construction: *There are two* **cats** *meowing in the back yard.* Part of the verb, *are meowing*, comes after *There* and before the subject *cats*.
- The sentence contains dialogue: *"Give me some cat food, pronto!" said* **Maisie***, in her own non-verbal way.* The verb is *said*; its subject is *Maisie.*
- The sentence has one or more negative clauses: **Maisie** *does not take anything I say seriously; neither does* **Fluffy***—nor, for that matter, do the* **cats** *next door.* Note that the subject of the second clause—*Fluffy*—comes after the verb (*does*), and the same happens with *cats* and *do.*
- The writer wants to emphasize the predicate adjective: *Even more outrageous is Fluffy's usual midnight* **snack attack***.* Here, *even more outrageous* modifies the subject *snack attack*. The sentence could be written *Fluffy's usual midnight snack attack is even more outrageous*, but placing the adjective phrase at the beginning of the sentence calls the reader's attention to it.
- The writer is aiming for literary effect: *Down from the mantelpiece, straight through the bedroom door, raced the* **two kittens***.*

Think About It

- Where can you use the action in a sentence to identify its subject?
- Where is the verb in relation to the subject?
- What is your clause about? What—or who—is in the spotlight of your sentence?

Though the subject often appears at or near the beginning of the clause, this is not always the case. Find the spotlight of the sentence, and you will find your subject.

Count and Noncount Nouns

Chapter 5: Section 2, Lesson 2

When teaching a child to count, you might easily say *one robot, two robots, three robots*. Such a progression seems very natural. However, you wouldn't similarly count *one robotics, two robotics*, *three robotics*. Saying or writing *a few robotics* just feels a little strange. This scenario helps show the grammatical distinction between *count* and *noncount nouns.* Count nouns, like *robot,* are ones that you can count and make plural. *Robotics,* on the other hand, is a noncount noun, which you cannot count or make plural; as a result, saying *roboticses* feels awkward—and it's just wrong!

Despite the awkwardness, if you write *a few robotics* or *roboticses*, readers will understand what you're trying to say. Why, then, does knowing the difference between count and noncount nouns really matter? You need to know whether a particular noun is countable or not for several reasons: to make singular and plural parts of a sentence agree; to apply the articles *a, an,* and *the* correctly; and to use determiners like *several* or *much* appropriately.

More on the Count/Noncount Distinction
When discussing count and noncount nouns, you may encounter any of the following pairings: *count/noncount nouns, count/mass nouns, countable/uncountable nouns.* Generally speaking, *count or countable nouns* refers to things that can be broken into individual, countable units. Their associated words can be made plural, as in these examples:

- *tool* (one tool, five tools, a few tools)
- *song* (one song, twelve songs, several songs)
- *fact* (one fact, two facts, many facts)

Noncount, mass, or uncountable nouns are things that cannot be counted because they're regarded as whole units. Their associated words are always used in the singular and cannot be made plural, as in these illustrations:

- *equipment* (not *equipments*)
- *music* (not *musics*)
- *information* (not *informations*)

Avoiding a form like *equipments*, *musics*, or *informations* is important because such a mistake quickly snowballs to the rest of the sentence. For example, someone who identifies *information* as a count noun may erroneously state "*Many of those informations are inaccurate.*" By making *information* plural and extending that plurality to the other italicized words, the writer has created four mistakes in a brief, six-word statement. To avoid such an avalanche of errors, take care to distinguish between count and noncount nouns.

Count or Noncount Noun "Rules"
In the examples of count and noncount nouns above, *facts* and *information* are similar sorts of things, so how do you know that *fact* belongs to one classification of noun and *information* to another? Most of the time, you know simply because you've heard and read both words often enough to know—not as a grammatical rule, but as a feeling or instinct. You've heard people say *The facts are* and *The information is* so often that you would just feel funny saying something like *those informations*.

In cases when you don't have a definite feeling or prior knowledge about whether a noun is count or noncount, some rules of thumb will help you predict into which group the noun might fall. As previously observed, if you can count a noun and make it plural, it falls under the *count* distinction. Consider the noun *towel.* Can you count it—*one towel, two towels, three towels*? Certainly! Can you make it plural—*towels*? Of course! Without a doubt, then, *towel* is a countable noun.

Determiners with Count and Noncount Nouns
So, how do you determine how much or how little of something you have? Determiners like *amount, much, little,* and *less* quantify noncount nouns, such as *milk*, *oil*, *compassion*, and *wealth*. Other

determiners, like *number, many, few,* and *fewer*, quantify count nouns, such as *sugar peas*, *gallons*, *kisses*, and *dollars*.

That means you could write:

- *the amount of people* BUT *the number of activists;*
- *the amount of progress* BUT *the number of changes;*
- *much devastation* BUT *many accidents*;
- *too much clothing* BUT *too many shoes*;
- *little traffic* BUT *few cars*;
- *a little* milk BUT *a few* drops

While noncount nouns are harder to identify, you can often recognize them because they fit into categories based on shared characteristics. Some common categories of noncount nouns are outlined in this table:

Category of Noncount Nouns	Examples
Abstractions, or things that seem more like "ideas" than objects or activities	- fun, love, peace - sadness, suffering, trouble - advice, kindness - information, intelligence, knowledge
Academic subjects	- history, psychology - economics, mathematics
General categories of things	- equipment, machinery - furniture, luggage - art, music
Liquids and gases	- blood, ink, milk, soup - helium, oxygen, smoke
Materials, especially those made of particles that seem too small or numerous to be counted	- cotton, steel - beef, bread - flour, rice, salt - dirt, hair, sand
Natural occurrences	- cold, decay, heat, radioactivity - hail, lightning, weather
Sports and activities	- hockey, running - chess, poker - homework, work

A Word of Caution

The above list of noncount nouns is short and incomplete, so it can't always help determine if a noun is countable or not. However, even more extensive lists aren't completely reliable because some nouns can belong to both the count and noncount groups. In such cases, a noun's status is determined by the way the writer intends to use it in a sentence. Look, for instance, at the following illustrations. In each statement the target noun becomes count or noncount based on subtle differences in meaning—

whether the author wishes for the word to designate *distinct, individual units* or *a "big idea" or collective group*:

- *love*
    - o Count: *Josephine Baker said, "I have two **loves**—Paris and my country."* Here, *loves* refers to individual things for which Baker had great affection.
    - o Noncount: ***Love** is the most powerful force in the world. Love* in this sentence designates a "big idea"—the emotion of deep concern and affection for another.
- *soup*
    - o Count: *All the **soups** in the store were canned soups from Campbell's.* In this sentence, *soups* references the individual types or containers of soup available.
    - o Noncount: *Americans usually serve **soup** as a separate course early in the meal.* Here, *soup* indicates a general category of food.
- *work*
    - o Count: *Her library contains all the **works** of Shakespeare. Works* in this sense refers to the multiple, distinct plays and poems that Shakespeare wrote.
    - o Noncount: *We always seem to have too much **work** to do.* In this statement, *work* designates a general idea of mental or physical activity done for a purpose.

Think About It

- Why is it important to know whether a noun is count or noncount?
- How does knowing a noun's category or its ability to form a plural help you decide if it's count or noncount?
- How does your intended meaning influence whether a noun is count or noncount?

Asking yourself these questions and analyzing your intent as you write can help you make correct choices regarding the tricky count/noncount noun distinction. As a result, it will be easier to make accurate decisions about singularity, plurality, and the verbs, pronouns, articles, and determiners that you need to use to "fill in" the rest of your sentences.

Gerunds

Chapter 5: Section 2, Lesson 3

For a sentence to be complete, it must have a subject and a verb. *John is running* is a complete sentence because it has a subject (*John*) and a verb (*is running*). What about *Running is a popular sport*, though? The main verb here appears to be *is*, but how can a verb like *Running* be a subject? The answer is that verbs ending in *-ing* can work as either verbs or as a kind of noun called a gerund.

Understanding Gerunds
Gerunds are a kind of noun made by adding *-ing* to the end of a verb. However, when the *-ing* form is used as a verb, it's called the *present participl*e (for more information, please see [Participles](#)). Here's a quick breakdown of the difference:

The *–ing* form of the verb is part of the **present participle** in these examples, where swimming is an action (verb) that either *I* am doing or *Marina* is doing:

- *I am **swimming** in the pool.*
- *Marina is **swimming** to cool off.*

In the **gerund form**, swimming is a thing that is either *making* "me" sore or being *allowed* by the beach. While gerunds are nouns, they can sometimes act like a verb.

- ***Swimming** makes me sore.*
- *This beach always allows **swimming**.*

Gerunds can take objects the way some verbs do:

- *I enjoy **reading**. Reading* is a gerund in this sentence.
- *I enjoy reading **comic books.** Comic books* is the object of the gerund *reading*, but *enjoy* is the verb.

Gerunds and Prepositions
Any time you have a preposition, you need to follow it with some sort of noun form (a noun, a pronoun, a noun phrase, a gerund, etc.). Often, the most effective and concise choice is to use a gerund. This isn't a rule, but it's a useful writing tip. Consider these two pairs of sentences. The first in each pair uses a noun after the prepositions *in* and *for*; the second uses a gerund.

*She will have no difficulty **in the identification of her car.***
*She will have no difficulty **identifying her car.***

*Finally, we were ready for **the measurement of the specimens.***
*Finally, we were ready for **measuring the specimens.***

The second sentence in each pair is shorter and more to-the-point. Concise, clear writing like this gets your ideas across more effectively.

In addition, the first sentence in each pair seems unnecessarily stiff and formal. The "voice" of the writer in the longer versions is overly complicated, but the "voice" of the writer in the shorter versions sounds just right for a college essay.

Using Gerunds After the Preposition To
Some writers have difficulty deciding what verbal form to use after the word to. After all, to can be two completely different things. It can be a preposition, as in

*They aren't accustomed **to eating** spicy food.*

*I am looking forward **to going** to the beach next weekend.*

But to can also be part of an infinitive verb, as in

*If your dinner invitation is for 7:00, you are expected **to be** there by 7:20.*
*Jason will not be able **to stay** for dessert.*

Most of the time, of course, you will find that to is part of an infinitive verb and is therefore followed by the base (or main) form of the verb. However, there are common idiomatic expressions to be aware of because you don't want to write mistakes like these:

***Error:** They aren't accustomed **to eat** spicy food.*
***Revised:** They aren't accustomed **to eating** spicy food.*
***Explanation:** Here, you have to use the gerund form of eat because the infinitive form would be incorrect.*

***Error:** I am looking forward **to go** to the beach next weekend.*
***Revised:** I am looking forward **to going** to the beach next weekend.*

In these examples, you need to use the gerund forms (eating and going) rather than the base verbs (eat and go) that you would expect to use.

Other Uses of Gerunds
Gerunds are often used as the subject of a verb:

*Example: **Walking** two or three miles a day is good exercise.*
Explanation: Walking is the thing (noun) that is (verb) good exercise (object).

*Example: **Fouling** another player may often be a deliberate act.*
Explanation: Fouling is the thing (subject) that may often be (verb) a deliberate act (object).

*Example: **Spitting** spreads diseases.*
Explanation: Spitting is the thing (subject) that spreads (verb) diseases (object).

Gerunds can be the object of some verbs. This is a partial list of verbs that often have gerunds as their objects:

admit	finish	discuss	miss	keep
risk	prevent	delay	like	appreciate
forbid	dislike	recall	avoid	postpone
suggest	joy	mind	regret	consider

*Example: The instructor refused to consider **letting** anyone hand in the paper after the due date.*
Explanation: Letting is the thing (object) that the instructor (subject) wouldn't consider (verb).

*Example: When the cable company has finished **putting in** the DSL line, our link to the Internet will be much better.*
Explanation: Putting in is the thing (object) that the cable company (subject) finished (verb).

*Example: She liked **living** in Ohio, but she missed **being** able to see the ocean.*
Explanation: Living is the thing (object) that she (subject) liked (verb). In the second half of the sentence, being able is also the thing (object) that she (subject) missed (verb).

Think About It

- *How can gerunds help make your writing more concise and clear?*
- *What rules do you need to keep in mind when using the preposition "to" with a gerund?*

- *Which sentences in your writing would benefit from including gerunds as subjects?*
- *Which sentences could include gerunds as objects?*

Gerunds often offer the shortest and simplest way to express an idea. Consider the questions above as a starting place in expanding your command of them.

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

Chapter 5: Section 2, Lesson 4

There's one constant with language: It's always changing. Often, language change begins in conversational English where we don't notice a shift that might be more evident in writing. Consider this common example:

When a student can choose the essay topic, they usually write a better paper.

In the past, traditional grammar rules have dictated that "a student" is a singular noun, and "they" is a plural pronoun; therefore, since "a student" is the antecedent for the pronoun "they," they don't agree in number. However, language has continued shifting to provide writers with a variety of pronoun options that still agree with the antecedents they replace.

Pronouns and Gender

Writers need inclusive options within a language that has traditionally identified as only male or female. In the past, "they" was considered a plural pronoun. Today, using "they" as a singular pronoun is an official practice in scholarly writing, and most linguists and style guides now endorse the use of "they" as a singular pronoun.

Ensuring Agreement

The simplest way to provide clear pronoun-antecedent agreement is to make both the antecedent noun and the pronoun plural. This revision of the sentence above follows this pattern:

*When **students** can choose their essay topics, **they** usually write better papers.*

Finding the Antecedent

Before you can check for pronoun-antecedent agreement, though, one of the challenges is recognizing the antecedent. The first step is to **identify the pronoun**. Take a look at these two sentences:

*The company is good to **its** employees. **They** are very grateful.*

The pronouns are *its* and *they*. To identify the antecedent, you may find it helpful to ask yourself, "Who or what is this pronoun referring to?" or "What does this pronoun actually mean?"

Here, we can ask the following questions to find the antecedents:

- ***Its***: Whose employees are these?
- ***They***: Who is very grateful?

Its refers to **the company**; *they* refers to **employees**. By finding these antecedents, we can see that they agree in number.

For more examples of pronoun-antecedent agreement in revision, see .

Understanding A Pronoun's Role

In addition to agreeing with the antecedent, a pronoun can

- take the place of a noun as a subject or object
- show possession

	Masculine (singular)	Feminine (singular)	Generic or Nonbinary (singular)	Plural
Subject	*He made a goal.* *I watched as **he** made the goal.*	***She** found the solution.* *In a moment of brilliance, **she** found the solution.*	*"Where is Cam?"* *"**They** are waiting in the hallway."*	***They** bought a new home.* *My parents said **they** bought a new home.*
Object	*The discussion surprised **him**.*	*The researcher consulted **her**.*	*This is my friend Cam; I met **them** at work.*	*The loan applicants said the bank official treated **them** fairly.*
Possessive	*The signature is **his**.*	***Her** dog has a loud bark.* *The dog is **hers**.*	*I gave Cam a gift for **their** birthday.*	*My parents' car broke down on the way to **their** new house.*

A pronoun is generic when referring to

- a person whose gender is unknown
- a person whose gender is irrelevant to the context
- a person who uses "they" or another self-identified pronoun as their pronoun
- a nonperson (e.g., a business, a computer)

	Generic Singular (person)	Generic Singular (nonperson)
Subject	***One** shouldn't yell in a library.*	***It** didn't work yesterday.*
Object	*That television show can provide **one** with new insights.*	*The technician took **it** apart.*
Possessive	*There are times when a person should not express **their** opinions.*	***Its** systems are too slow.*

Think About It

- What options do I have when matching pronouns to their antecedents?
- Where will possessive pronouns help clarify ownership?
- What can I do to ensure my pronouns are inclusive, respectful, and nonbinary?

With the answers to these questions in mind, your use of pronouns will be sharp and specific!

Predicates

Chapter 5: Section 2, Lesson 5

All clauses are made up of a subject and predicate. While the subject is the person or thing that the sentence is about, the predicate completes the clause. A subject all by itself does nothing, even if it's introduced and described. If someone were to say, "The alarm clock," you'd ask, "What about the alarm clock?" And if someone said, "Late one night, the old mechanical alarm clock on my night table," you'd still ask, "What about it? What did the alarm clock do? Why even mention the alarm clock?" The subject always needs a predicate.

The Simple Predicate
A simple predicate is an unadorned verb: *The alarm clock **rang***. There may be more than one verb in a simple predicate: *The alarm clock **woke up** and **rang***. The verb or verbs in a simple predicate may be made up of more than one word since verbs can be formed with auxiliaries: *The alarm clock **did ring** and **would not stop***.

Complete Predicates
Most predicates consist of more than verbs: They may also include modifiers of the verbs (such as adverbs), as well any objects or complements of those verbs, and the words that modify the objects or complements. (Whew!) In a sentence such as *The old mechanical alarm clock on my night table went off in the middle of the night, waking the entire household,* the subject is *The old mechanical alarm clock on my night table*, and the rest of the sentence is the complete predicate. A complete predicate may include

- **Transitive verbs and their direct objects:** If a verb is transitive, that means it requires a direct object.
    - *My family hates that alarm clock.* The subject is *family*; its verb is *hates*; the direct object of that verb is *alarm clock*.
    - *I threw that stupid alarm clock across the room and smashed it against the wall.* The subject is *I*; the rest of the sentence is the predicate. Note that the sentence has a compound predicate (*threw* and *smashed*), and that each verb takes a direct object (*that stupid alarm clock* and *it*).
- **Transitive verbs and indirect objects:** An indirect object tells who (or what) the action of the verb is to or for. It doesn't directly receive the action—it benefits, in some way, from the action.
    - *This clock gives me endless grief. Grief* is the direct object of the verb *gives*; *me* is its indirect object—the clock gives grief to me.
- **Intransitive verbs and predicate adjectives:** Intransitive linking verbs, like "to be" and "to seem," can be followed by material that describes the subject of the clause.
    - *My alarm clock was expensive.* The verb *to be* is intransitive (*was* is the third person singular past tense). The adjective *expensive* describes the subject, *alarm clock.*
    - *It will be hard to replace.* Again, the verb is *to be* (*will be* is its future tense). The adjective phrase *hard to replace* describes *it.*
- **Intransitive verbs and predicate nominatives:** These verbs may be followed by nouns and noun passages which name the subject in a different way.
    - *As it turns out, that alarm clock was a priceless family heirloom. Heirloom* is the predicate noun.
    - In a predicate nominative construction, it may help to think of the linking verb (usually *to be*) as an equal sign. In this case, the *alarm clock* is the *priceless family heirloom.* The two things are identical.
    - You might think, since the two things are identical, that the subject

and its predicate nominative might be switched—*A priceless family heirloom was, as it turns out, that alarm clock.* But switching places shows the important difference between subject and predicate nominative: The spotlight of the sentence isn't on the heirloom in the first sentence—it's on the clock, and rightly so. Refer to [Subjects](#) to see more on what should be in the spotlight in your sentences.

Think About It

- What is the subject of your sentence or clause and how can it help identify the predicate?
- How can knowing what each of your subjects is being or doing help shape your predicates?
- What else might you include and/or revise to make your predicates complete?

Most sentences do not have simple predicates. Modifiers—words, phrases, and even clauses—may cluster around the verb, making the sentence more informative than it would be if it were made only of the subject and verb alone. Recognizing what constitutes a complete predicate will help you understand how your sentences are structured, which will sharpen your writing.

Subject-Verb Agreement

Chapter 5: Section 2, Lesson 6

When constructing sentences, there's a lot to consider: content, word choice, word order, punctuation, and much more. However, no matter what other elements you choose to include in your sentence, you must have subject-verb agreement to create clear sentences.

The Basic Rules of Agreement
Subject-verb agreement is a grammar rule that applies to sentences in the simple present tense and other tenses that use *am/is/are, was/were* or *has/have*. When you use these tenses, each verb must agree with its subject. The subject of a sentence is the noun or pronoun that performs the action. A subject can be first person, second person, or third person. It can also be plural or singular. The following charts demonstrate how to make simple present-tense verbs agree with each type of subject.

	Singular	
First Person	**I am** a student.	**We are** students.
Second Person	**You are** a student.	**You all are**
Third Person	**Samir is** a student.	**Jack and Luis are**

	Singular	
First Person	**I have** several questions.	**We have**
Second Person	**You have** several questions.	**You all have**
Third Person	**The detective has** several questions.	**The children have** questions.

	Singular	
First Person	**I eat** lunch at noon.	**We eat** lunch at noon.
Second Person	**You eat** lunch at noon.	**You all eat**
Third Person	**Diego eats** lunch at noon.	**The cats eat**

The past-tense form of "to be" also has different spellings for each type of subject, as demonstrated below.

	Singular	
First Person	**I was** a student.	**We were**
Second Person	**You were** a student.	**You all were**
Third Person	**Samir was** a student.	**Jack and Luis were**

The verbs is/am/are, was/were, and has/have are used to create past progressive, present progressive, present perfect, and present perfect progressive tenses. The

following examples demonstrate these tenses:

- **Past Progressive:** *The students were taking a test. The instructor was reading a newspaper.*
- **Present Progressive:** *The family is hosting a foreign exchange student. The participants are completing a survey.*
- **Present Perfect:** *Professor Jones has lived in Topeka for 15 years. She and her husband have worked at the college since 1995.*
- **Present Perfect Progressive:** *The cats have been sleeping all afternoon. The neighbor has been growing vegetables in her backyard since last summer.*

Common Causes of Subject-Verb Agreement Errors
When there's a lack of agreement between the subject and verb in a sentence, readers can end up confused. Usually, the subject and verb don't agree because a third-person subject is paired with a verb that has the wrong ending or spelling. That kind of error can occur in the following situations:

- **The plural form of a third-person subject does not end in –s.** Some examples of these nouns include *people, children, women,* and *men.*
  - **Incorrect:** *Children **learns (?)** by example.*
  - **Correct:** *Children **learn** by example.*
  - **Incorrect:** *Cacti **thrives (?)** in arid climates.*
  - **Correct:** *Cacti **thrive** in arid climates.*

- **Other words appear between the subject and verb.** This often occurs when there is a prepositional phrase after the subject. This causes challenges because a prepositional phrase also includes a noun, but the object of a preposition cannot be the subject of a sentence. You can avoid this lack of agreement if you mentally leave out words between the subject and verb so the true subject and verb are easier to find:
  - **Incorrect: Each** *of the students **are (?)** responsible for paying tuition costs on time.*
    (If you left out *of the students,* the prepositional phrase between the subject and verb, you'd get *Each are.* The verb *are* does not agree with *Each,* so it's incorrect.)
  - **Correct: Each** *of the students **is** responsible for paying tuition costs on time.*
  - **Incorrect:** *The **students** at this college **has (?)** many tutoring options.*
  - **Correct:** *The **students** at this college **have** many tutoring options.*

- **A compound subject is connected by *and*.** When you have two or more subjects connected by *and,* the subject is plural and needs a verb that does not end in -s:
  - **Incorrect:** *Rob and Cindy **plans (?)** a two-week vacation from their jobs.*
    (Since *Rob and Cindy* is connected with *and,* it's a plural subject and needs a plural verb.)
  - **Correct:** *Rob and Cindy **plan** a two-week vacation from their jobs.*

- **A compound subject is connected by *or* or *nor*.** The verb should agree

with the part of the subject that is nearest to the verb itself.

- o **Incorrect:** *Either Rob or Cindy* **plan (?)** *to till the garden next week.*
(Since *Rob or Cindy* is connected by *either/or,* the verb needs to agree with *Cindy,* the part of the subject that's nearest to the verb; therefore, the verb should end in -s.)
- o **Correct:** *Either Rob or Cindy* **plans** *to till the garden next week.*
- o **Incorrect:** *Either Cindy or her parents* **is (?)** *buying more mulch.*
- o **Correct:** *Either Cindy or her parents* **are** *buying more mulch.*
(Since the subjects are connected by *either/or,* the verb needs to agree with the closest noun, *parents.*)

- **An indefinite pronoun is the subject of a sentence.** Indefinite pronouns like *any, everyone,* and *nothing* have singular meanings and should have verbs that end in –s. The following indefinite pronouns are always singular:

anybody, anyone, anything	*neither, either*
each	*nobody, no one, nothing*
everybody, everyone, everything	*somebody, someone, something*

- o **Incorrect:** *Any of us* **are** *qualified to do the job.* (Because *any* is a singular indefinite pronoun, it cannot be paired with the plural verb *are.*)
- o **Correct:** *Any of us* **is** *qualified to do the job.* (*any* refers to "any one person," which is singular; therefore, the verb should be *is.*)

- **A collective noun is the subject of a sentence.** Similarly, collective nouns like *class, family,* and *team* refer to a group that acts as a single unit; thus, these nouns, too, should have verbs that end in –s when they're used to refer to the whole unit:
- o **Incorrect:** *The baseball team scream wildly after winning the game.*
- o **Correct:** *The baseball team* **screams** *wildly after winning the game.*
(*Team* refers to a group acting as one, so the verb *screams* is the correct choice.)

- **Your sentence begins with the words *there is* or *there are* (or *there was* or *there were*).** When a sentence begins with there, the verb should agree with the *subject complement,* which is the closest noun or pronoun that follows the verb:
- o *There* **is** *a great old movie showing at the cinema tonight.*
(Since *movie* follows *there* and *movie* is singular, the verb should be *is.*) You can check the agreement by making the chosen noun your subject, like this: *A great old movie is showing at the cinema tonight.*
- o *There* **are** *three frightening horror films showing at the cinema tonight.*
(Since *films* follow *there* and *films* is plural, the verb should be *are.*)

Think About It

- What verb endings or spellings are appropriate for third-person, plural subjects?
- What verbs should go with indefinite pronouns that act as subjects?
- When should you use *there is* versus *there are?*

Subject-verb agreement means that the verbs have the correct spelling or ending to match the subject of each sentence. Checking the subjects and verbs in each sentence can help you to create a draft with consistent subject-verb agreement.

Simple Verb Tenses

Chapter 5: Section 2, Lesson 7

What makes the simple verb tense *simple*? In this verb tense, the past and present do *not* require auxiliary verbs (helping verbs) for meaning. That's what makes them simple, or a little less complicated. For example

- Simple past: I **talked** to her yesterday.
- Simple present: The cat **plays** with cotton balls.

Though the simple future tense *does* use an auxiliary verb (*will*), it's also considered a simple tense. For example:

- Simple future: I **will find** the person who took my car keys.

The simple verb tenses are the least complicated way to express ideas, so knowing when to use them will help you write more clearly.

Knowing Which Simple Tense to Use

One way to decide which tense to use is to think in terms of *when*. If you're writing about something you *did* in the past, you'll use one of the *past tenses*. When you're discussing *what you do on a regular basis*, you'll work with *present tense*. To write about something you *have not done yet but expect to do in the future*, you'll use *future tense*.

The simple tenses look like this:

Simple Past	Simple Present	Simple Future
I **called** my friend. You *did* this action in the past.	My friend **calls** me. The action is something that is *repeated, usual, or habitual*.	My friend **will call** me. The action has not happened yet, but is *expected or predicted to happen*.

Conjugating (Forming) Verbs in Simple Tenses
Simple Past

To make your verbs reflect simple past, you'll need to know how to form the past tense of regular verbs. You'll also want to make sure you're comfortable making irregular verbs reflect past tense.

- Regular Verbs: For **simple past tense**, regular verbs take the **-***ed* ending. It's conjugated from the base form of the verb (or the infinitive) **+** *ed* (or -*d*). Consider these examples:
  - *His dog **barked** at me.*
  - *Dad **paced** restlessly while he **waited**.*

The base form of these verbs are *to bark, to pace,* and *to wait.* Because they're regular verbs, putting them in the past tense is relatively simple.

- Irregular Verbs: Some verbs change their form and don't follow the **-***ed* rule, which is part of what makes them *irregular*. For example:
  - *She **became** an engineer.*

Here, the base form is *to become*, but instead of adding -*ed*,

the *o* in *become* changes to an *a* to make *became*, which is past tense.

Irregular verbs can have a variety of past tense forms. Find strategies for learning them at Irregular Verbs or look for a list in the Irregular Verbs chart.

Simple Present
Simple present tense reflects an action that is repeated or habitual. It can also show what a person thinks or believes. Regular verbs follow a consistent conjugation model, but look carefully! You'll see that the third-person singular form (the one that goes with *he, she* or *it)* takes an *-s* or *-es* at the end:

- *Daniela **drives** a small car.*
- *I **take** the bus.*

In the preceding examples, the verb tense is in the present. Use the present tense

- In essays that discuss literature, such as poetry, novels, short stories, or plays (unless in APA format)
- In summaries or paraphrases (unless in APA format)
- When analyzing visual media, such as films, television, works of art, or advertisements
- When writing about general truths or scientific facts

Simple Future
Simple future tense can refer to an expected action in the near or far future, an immediate future action, or a prediction of an action. It's formed by *will* and the base form of the verb:

- ***Expected near future action:*** *She **will write** her essay tomorrow.*
- ***Expected far future action**: The students **will need** to plan for retirement.*
- ***Immediate future action:*** *I'm cold, so I **will turn on** the heater.*
- ***Prediction**: I **will pass** the test!*

In each of these examples, the action hasn't yet occurred. Even if the action is expected to occur a few seconds from now, it's still in the future. For more examples of the simple tenses, see Verb Tenses.

Think About It

- When did the actions you're writing about happen?
- How should tense change based on when these actions occurred?
- Which actions are expected or predicted to happen?

Knowing the time frame of an event will help you determine the best tense, making the actions you write about easier for readers to understand.

Verb Tenses: Progressive and Perfect

Chapter 5: Section 2, Lesson 8

In the recesses of the mind, tenses like progressive and perfect invoke memories

of long-winded lectures from middle school, but these verb forms aren't as complicated as they may have seemed back then. Here's a helpful starting point:

- Progressive (past, present, future)
- Perfect (past, present, future)
- Perfect progressive (past, present, future)

Progressive (Also Known as Continuous)
This tense emphasizes that the action *is currently happening* or *was/will be continuously happening at the same time as something else*. The following examples demonstrate progressive tense:

- I **am typing** this sentence.
- She **was enjoying** the game until it got too difficult.
- Soon, they **will be looking** for a new approach to the problem.

These examples reflect a sense of *immediate* or *ongoing* action. This verb tense can help you be even more specific about the *duration* of an action.

When to Use the Progressive Tense
You'll mostly use this verb tense in conversation or in personal reflection. For example, you might tell someone on the phone what you're doing *right then* during the conversation, or you might remark on something that a person is *always* doing or not doing. You might also use this tense to write dialogue in a narrative, to express goals, or to provide immediate observations. Knowing what progressive tense looks like can help you better determine when to use it.

What Progressive Tense Looks Like
The past progressive tense creates the sense that an action *occurred over a period of time in the past.*

Past Progressive	
The event happened in the past, but the action was **ongoing.**	We **were swimming** at the beach all day on Saturday.
The action was ongoing but was **interrupted or stopped.**	She **was enjoying** the game until it got too difficult.
The ongoing action occurred **simultaneously** with another action.	I **was eating** my lunch when Harry stopped by.

The present progressive tense creates the sense that the action is *occurring right now*, is *ongoing*, or is *habitual.*

Present Progressive	
An action that is **happening right now** or immediately.	My friend **is calling** me.
The action is happening now and is **ongoing.**	She **is studying** to become a neurologist.
The speaker **remarks on an action** as ongoing (usually accompanied by "always" or "constantly").	You **are** always **singing!**

The future progressive tense gives us a sense of ho*w the action is expected or anticipated to* happen.

Future Progressive	
A future action that is **anticipated** to be	Next year, I **will be working** on my

ongoing.	thesis.

Perfect

This verb tense lets writers explain that one action was completed before another action or an earlier time. In a sense, it helps connect or bridge different times so that, for example, the past can apply to the present or a further past to a recent past. Unlike the progressive tense, perfect tense provides a more solid sense of beginning. While the perfect may not make any promises about the completion of an action, it roots readers in a certain time. Progressive tense, by its ongoing nature, does not provide the same sense of beginning or ending, especially in comparison to the simple tenses. Compare progressive, perfect, and simple here:

- Esteban and Julie **were deciding** where to honeymoon when they heard about the hurricane.
- Esteban and Julie **have decided** that Cancun is the best choice for their honeymoon.
- Esteban and Julie **decided** that Cancun is the best choice for their honeymoon.

The first sentence suggests that the discussion is an **ongoing** one, something they revisit from time to time. In the second sentence, **the action—**making the decision of where to go—is **complete**. The emphasis is not so much *where* they decided to go as it is that *they decided on it* (completed the action). The third, the simple form, occurred at a specific time and doesn't extend beyond it.

When to Use the Perfect Tense

This is a verb tense that you'll use in many types of writing. Specifically, you might find it useful when writing research papers in APA format (*Smith has reported . . .*).

What Perfect Tense Looks Like

Comparing the tenses is the best way to figure out which one to use. The following examples offer some context to clarify how these tenses work.

	Past	Present	Future
Simple	I **walked** through the park yesterday.	I **walk** through the park every day.	I **will walk** through the park later.
Progressive	When I **was walking** through the park, I saw a deer.	I **am walking** through the park right now.	I **will be walking** through the park later. Will you join me?
Perfect	I **had walked** through the park, but I didn't see the changes.	I **have walked** through the park on occasion, but I don't want to today.	I **will have walked** through the park by then, so we can talk at that time.
Perfect Progressive	I **had been walking** through the park when I suddenly fell ill.	I'm tired because I **have been walking** through the park.	I **will have been walking** through the park before going to school.

Notice how each of these examples puts the action in a slightly different context. For more examples, see Verb Tenses.

Think About It

- Where should the progressive be used to show that events in your writing are happening or ongoing?
- Where is the perfect tense needed to show a solid sense of beginning or

ending?
- Which verbs might need revision, to perfect or progressive, depending on their context?

The differences in meaning with progressive tenses and perfect tenses can be slight, but using them appropriately will deliver your intended meaning to your readers with clarity and accuracy.

Verb Tense Shifts

Chapter 5: Section 2, Lesson 9

You may have heard "Be careful with *verb tense shifts,*" but what exactly is a tense shift? This issue most commonly occurs when writers *unintentionally* switch "when" they're talking about. They might switch from talking about something that happened in the past to something happening right now or switch between something that will happen and something that happens all the time. The key to avoiding such shifts is to understand *why* you're using a particular tense.

Unintentional and Intentional Tense Shifts

Unintentional shifts happen often in conversation, but they can cause confusion when they appear in writing. Here's an example of a writer *unintentionally* using two different verb tenses:

*When Maria **went** to a dance, she **dances** with her friend.*

There are two verbs in the example: *went* is in the past tense, and *dances* is in the present tense. This kind of shift leaves the reader confused about *when* something happened (or is happening). Did this event happen in the past? *When* did Maria dance with her friend?

Fixing Tense Shifts

To fix a verb tense shift, you'll want to make sure all of your verbs "match." For example, revising the sentence above might look like:

- **All past tense:** *When Maria **went** to a dance, she **danced** with her friend.*
- **All present tense:** *When Maria **goes** to a dance, she **dances** with her friend.*

Either way will work, but notice that the meaning changes as the verb tense changes. The first example is about something that happened in the past. The second example is about something that generally happens or usually happens. For more examples, see [Top 10 Writing Concerns](#) and [Verb Tenses](#).

Finding Tense Shifts

You can practice finding shifts by looking at an unintentional tense shift in a stand-alone sentence. Consider this example:

*I **ate** my breakfast, **did** some yoga, and **got** ready to go to work, but at the worst possible moment, my toddler **spills** her milk all over me.*

In this sentence, the writer is referring to past events but uses present tense to emphasize the bigger event (the milk spill). In conversation, this would work, and it would emphasize the humor of the situation. However, in writing, the reader may be confused because all of these actions should happen in the past, but they aren't all in the past tense.

Sometimes, you'll need to layer in a tense change. In those cases, you'll need to make an intentional tense shift. As in the example of Maria at the dance, knowing the intended meaning is essential. For comparison, take a look at this intentional tense shift:

*Although during the trip I **was relaxed**, once we got nearer to my parents' home, I **became** agitated. I **think** my change in behavior at that point may have been due to my fear of confrontation.*

In this example, the writer is reflecting in the *present time* (*I think*) on something that happened in *past time* (*the trip*). To check whether the tense shift is appropriate, see what happens when the second sentence is revised to all past tense:

*I **thought** my change in behavior at that point might have been due to my fear of confrontation.*

In this case, the meaning would be completely changed. The writer would be sharing another point from the past. He or she is no longer *reflecting* on a past event but *narrating* what happened in the event.

Avoiding Tense Shifts
The process of identifying and revising tense shifts is very different than avoiding them altogether. Your best bet is to make sure that your reason for writing is clear to you: the kind of essay you're writing can affect your tense. Here are a few strategies to consider:

	Past Tense	Present Tense	Literary Present Tense
Essay Type	Narrative essays Memoirs Autobiographical writing Personal experiences Literature reviews Journal articles	General analyses (comparative, evaluative, causal, rhetorical, historical) Personal reflection Observation	Literary analyses (literature, film)
Examples	*First, we **tried** to open the door, but that **proved** too difficult. We eventually **found** ourselves on the roof, trying to call our mother.* *That Christmas, we **had** a six-foot tree, **decorated** with popcorn on string. The smell of pine needles, apple pie, and pumpkin spice **wafted** through the air.* *Cheng and Szuborski (2011) **found** that fifty percent of unwed mothers **were** emotionally traumatized.*	*Although both aspirin and ibuprofen **provide** pain relief, they **differ** in the pain they target.* *Statistically, a greater number of insolvencies **contributes** to economic decline.* *I **believe** my Myers-Briggs score **is** valid.* *The lady in front of me **takes** out her wallet and **says,** "I want to see the manager."*	*The main character **exhibits** several compulsive behaviors, including twirling her hair and chewing her nails. These actions **contribute** to her eventual social demise as her grand lady facade **falls** away.* *Metropolis **offers** viewers a glimpse into the earliest attempts at special effects in film.* *Hughes **conveys** a progression of ideas as he moves from the medical imagery of "a sore," to the war imagery of "explode" (752).*

Think About It

- What kind of essay or paper are you writing and how does that affect tense choices?
- If you're writing about an event or experience, *when* did it happen?
- Where should tense shifts be revised to help readers when events actually occurred?

With the answers to these questions in mind, you'll be on your way to a consistent use of verb tenses!

Being and Linking Verbs

Chapter 5: Section 2, Lesson 10

As two-year-old Cecile begins to talk, she says things like: I playing. She my Mommy. Cupcakes yummy. Although these statements relay the essence of her message, each one leaves out a small but critical verb that would add meaning or connect her key words: I was playing. She is my Mommy. Cupcakes smell yummy. As she masters language, Cecile will begin to include to be and other linking verbs in her sentences. Understanding how to use these verbs can also help you, as a mature writer, communicate the subtleties of your ideas, forge connections, and link your sentences smoothly.

The Verb To Be
The verb to be is used more frequently than any other verb in English—both as a helping, or auxiliary, verb, and as a main verb. There are eight forms of the verb to be, as outlined below:

Verb Form	Examples	
Base form: **be**	The candidates may **be** nervous about the upcoming election.	
Present tense: **am, is, are**	I **am** eager to see who wins. You **are** overjoyed to be running. He **is** a reluctant candidate.	We **are** opening the polls. You **are** preparing to vote. They **are** counting the ballots.
Past tense: **was, were**	I **was** awaiting the results. You **were** sitting patiently. She **was** delivering the news.	We **were** jittery during the delay. You **were** apprehensive. They **were** upset by the outcome.
Present participle (or active voice): **being**	The winner is **being** announced to the masses.	
Past participle (or passive voice): **been**	The candidate has **been** notified of his victory.	

See Participles for more details about present and past participles.

To Be as a Helping Verb
As a helping verb, to be works with other verbs to create the progressive, or continuous, tenses and the passive voice. These constructions express nuances about a main verb, including the action's time frame or its relationship to the subject.

Construction and Meaning	Examples
The Progressive, or Continuous, Tenses	

Past, present, and future forms of the verb *to be* can be combined with the *present participle* of a main verb to identify continuous, expected, or ongoing actions.	• *I **was thinking** about donating my bicycle to the toy drive.* • *What items **are** you **going** to contribute?* • *The Children's Center **will be collecting** donations each weekend this month.*
The Passive Voice	
A form of the verb *to be* can be combined with the *past participle* of a main verb to form the passive voice. This voice indicates that the verb's action is being performed on the grammatical subject.	• *The Children's Center **is supported** by various benefactors.* • *Pledges **are being sought** for the next fiscal year.*

More information about the use of to be in progressive and passive constructions is in Verb Tenses: Progressive and Perfect and in Active and Passive Voice.

To Be as a Main Verb

When used as a main verb, to be acts as a linking verb. A linking verb does not show action; instead, it connects a sentence's subject to a word in the predicate that complements, or completes, the subject's meaning. This subject complement can be a noun that renames the subject or an adjective that modifies it. Look at these examples:

Angelo is the president of the Student Council.

Here, the linking verb is connects the subject Angelo to the noun president—a subject complement, or predicate noun, that identifies Angelo.

He was quite happy when he won the election.

Here, the linking verb was connects the subject he to the adjective happy—a subject complement, or predicate adjective, that describes he.

Other Linking Verbs

While the forms of to be are the most common linking verbs, other verbs can also be used to "link" a subject to an identifying noun or modifying adjective in the predicate. Several alternate linking verbs are illustrated below:

State of Being Verbs	
appear *become* *seem* *grow* *prove* *remain* *turn*	*That stray dog **appears** hungry.* *Its barks **are becoming** louder.* *The poodle wandering the neighborhood **seems** lost.* *The puppy **grew** frightened after its owner shut off the lights.* *Her efforts to find her bulldog **proved** fruitless.* *A dog **remains** a puppy for about a year.* *The usually calm beagle **turns** excited as strangers approach.*
Sensory Verbs	
feel *look* *smell* *sound* *taste*	*The freshly-baked bread still **feels** too hot.* *The pepperoni and mushroom pizza **looks** delicious.* *Yuck! That spice **smells** disgusting.* *A whistling kettle **sounds** irritatingly loud.* *The tacos **taste** disappointingly bland.*

Note that when each of these verbs acts as a linking verb in a sentence, you can replace it with a

form of the verb to be, and the sentence will still make sense:

- After making ten dozen cupcakes, Alan grew tired of baking. / After making ten dozen cupcakes, Alan was tired of baking.
- The pink frosting tastes sickeningly sweet. / The pink frosting is sickeningly sweet.

However, while to be effectively connects equal ideas, it can be tiresome to use the same word too often. Varying your linking verbs can build reader interest and add shades of meaning to your text. Grew, for instance, indicates that Alan gradually became tired instead of just suddenly feeling tired. Tastes tells the reader through which sense the writer perceives the frosting's state of being sickeningly sweet.

Think About It

- What forms of the verb to be can you combine with main verbs to create passive or progressive constructions?
- Where will using to be as a main verb allow you to "link" a sentence's subject to a key noun or adjective in the predicate?
- What alternate linking verbs could you use in your writing to forge relationships between subjects and their complements?

Keeping these questions in mind, you can choose between to be and the other linking verbs to connect your subjects and predicates, and you can correctly use the forms of to be to support main verbs. As a result, your expressions will become as smooth and precise as twelve-year-old Cecile's mature declaration I was playing video games in the den until I smelled Mom's triple chocolate cupcakes baking in the kitchen and came to taste one.

Irregular Verbs

Chapter 5: Section 2, Lesson 11

You're probably already comfortable making the past tense of regular verbs by simply adding an *–ed* to the base form and making the past participle by adding *–en* or *-ed*. Irregular verbs are the exception to this rule, and to other rules as well. Their past and past participle forms can take a variety of different spellings.

Most good dictionaries include a list of the irregular verbs you need to know, so have one handy to check whether a verb is regular or irregular. Once you know that, you can better determine how to form that verb's principal parts—the four forms that all English verbs have. For example, the principal parts of the verb *go* are *go*, *went*, *going*, and *gone*.

You won't always be able to consult a dictionary, though, so it's a good idea to be familiar with many of the different irregular verb forms. Luckily, there are many options that will help you learn these words and easily use them when needed.

Strategies for Learning Irregular Verbs

There are probably as many strategies for learning these forms as there are learners. Below are a few popular strategies to try:

- **Use charts to note groups of irregular verbs with similar sounds:** You can take a look at a grammar book or dictionary that offers a list of irregular verbs (or look at the Irregular Verbs chart in the Appendix) to help you notice the patterns in how the verbs are constructed. For example, verbs like *hit* or *quit* have the same form in the present, past, and past participle. Other verbs like *swing* and *sit* have a present tense form with a particular vowel, an *i* in this case, that changes in the past and past participles (*swing*, *swung*, *swung*; *sit*, *sat*, *sat*). You can find many resources that can help you chart these patterns.

- **Seek out a study partner or two and quiz each other:** Using charts as a starting point, check each other's knowledge of various forms of irregular verbs. For example, if your partner said "sit," you could reply with "sat, sat." Then you could pick a verb and ask him or her to reply with the past and past participle.

- **Play games:** Your memory will be helpful here. You can start by saying the present tense form of one irregular verb you're familiar with, and your partner can respond with the past tense form, waiting for you to return with the past participle before then moving on to another verb. If you wish to make the game competitive, try keeping score.

This list is not at all exhaustive, but it may help you develop other games or strategies that fit your interests and learning styles. As your command of irregular verbs grows, you'll be able to recall them from memory when needed. After a while, you'll be able to remember these forms without effort.

Participle Variants

Despite all good intentions, some verbs will still defy expectations, and poor word choice may affect the overall correctness of your writing. Consider these examples:

- ***Light*:** The past tense of *light* was once *lighted*, but that regular past tense form has shifted to the word *lit*. While either form is acceptable in standard written English, not knowing this may cause some handwringing on the part of writers looking to make sure everything they've phrased in their

documents is up to par in terms of overall correctness.

- **_Sneak_:** the past tense, _sneaked_ is rapidly losing popularity to the variant _snuck_. In some instances, you can still find people who will tell you that the word _snuck_ is incorrect, and it may be best to revert back to the regular form in academic and professional writing. However, in less formal writing, _snuck_ is widely popular and is becoming more prevalent.

- **_Drag:_** An even more off-beat irregularization of a regular verb appears in the past tense of _drag_. In casual conversation, people often say _drug_ instead of the regular form _dragged._ And, because people tend to write like they speak, _drug_ slips into many documents in place of _dragged_. However, _drug_ isn't as widely accepted as _dragged._ Outside of perhaps trying to capture the flavor of regional dialogue in a short story or creative essay, it shouldn't be used in formal writing.

In addition to these variants, some verbs have both regular and irregular past and past participle forms that _are_ typically acceptable in academic settings. Take the word **bet**. One might say that he **betted** on a particular horse to win, but then he could just as correctly say that he **bet** on a horse. That's because **bet** and **betted** are both acceptable past or past participle forms. Other verbs that have both a regular and irregular past and past participle form are as follows:

- **Fit—**_He **fit** the pieces into their appropriate places_ vs. _He **fitted** the pieces into their appropriate places._
- **Quit—**_He **quit** the room after the tension increased_ vs. _He **quitted** the room after the tension increased._
- **Rid—**_He **rid** himself of four pairs of shoes that day_ vs. _He **ridded** himself of four pairs of shoes that day._
- **Wed—**_The two **wed** in the fall of the year_ vs. _The two **wedded** in the fall of the year_.
- **Wet—**_I **wet** down the house roof before the forest fire reached the area_ vs. _I **wetted** down the house roof._

Finally, some verbs just have one past tense form with two generally accepted past participles:

- **Prove—**_He had **proved** it beyond a reasonable doubt_ vs. _He had **proven** it beyond a reasonable doubt._
- **Forget—**_She had **forgot** it, but she remembered when the sun went down_ vs. _She had **forgotten** it, but she remembered when the sun went down._
- **Got—**_She had **got** it from the store three days prior_ vs. _She had **gotten** it from the store three days prior._
- **Bit—**_The snake had **bit** him just above the ankle_ vs. _The snake had **bitten** him just above the ankle._

Clearly, language is constantly changing. The different verb forms above are evidence of this. To find the most correct use of one of these (or other) irregular verbs you come across, check a grammar book, dictionary, or corpus—an online database where you can search for a word or phrase to compare its use across thousands of texts. Any of these tools will help you see if the form you're using for an irregular verb is actually what's widely used and accepted for an academic audience. As some of the examples above indicate, there could be more than one acceptable form. If your research shows that the word isn't commonly used, or only is used in very special contexts (spoken by a particular character on a sitcom or

drama), use the standard form, even if it may grate your ears.

Think About It

- Which verbs have forms that seem to follow a similar pattern, like those shown above?
- What resources could help you track these particular patterns?
- What techniques or games will help you learn the irregular forms?
- Which verbs in your writing have irregular forms that you might want to check?

With these questions in mind, work on choosing the appropriate form of the verb you're using, based on your knowledge or the research you've done regarding these verbs.

Helping Verbs

Chapter 5: Section 2, Lesson 12

Consider the answers that your friend Antonio might offer when you ask if he is ever going to marry his longtime girlfriend, Griselda:

- I *am marrying* Griselda next month.
- I *did marry* her!
- I *might marry* her one of these days.
- I *must marry* her since I promised my mother.
- I *would marry* her if her mother weren't so aggravating.

Even though the main verb—*marry*—is the same in these sentences, each response describes Antonio's intentions towards Griselda quite differently. These varying shades of meaning are the result of Antonio's differing choices of helping verb—*am, did, might, must,* or *would.* In the context of a verb phrase, a *helping verb* is placed before a main verb to "help" add complex information about time or mood to an expressed action. As Antonio's answers illustrate, choosing appropriate helping verbs when you write is necessary to communicate with accuracy.

Be, *Have*, and *Do*

Also called *auxiliary verbs*, helping verbs can be divided into two categories: the forms of *be, have,* and *do* and the *modal auxiliaries*. *Be, have,* and *do* can be used as either main verbs or helping verbs. In both usages, they must be conjugated, or altered in form, to match with their subjects.

	Main Verb	**Helping Verb**
be	I **am** happy to have completed the race.	He **is running** in a marathon today.
have	I **have** two turtles and a dog as pets.	The dog **has buried** a turtle in the yard.
do	I **do** my homework immediately after school.	She **does need** help with her homework.

When used in verb phrases as helping verbs, *be, have,* and *do* provide information about time and emphasis, as outlined in the following table.

Verb Forms	**Meaning as a Helping Verb**	**Examples**
am are is was were be been	*Be* is used to form the *progressive tenses*, which provide information about continuous, expected, or ongoing actions.	- Right now, I **am worrying**. - We **are taking** an exam tomorrow. - The teacher **is planning** to make all the remaining tests difficult. - I **was swimming** this morning while the other girls **were studying.** - Now, I **will be studying** all night.

	Be is also used to form the *passive voice*, which demonstrates that something is performing the verb's action *on* the subject.	• The last test **was failed** by half the class.
has have had	*Have* is used to form the *perfect tenses*, which describe actions that are completed or ongoing.	• At last, he **has received** his acceptance letter. • We **have awaited** the university's decision since May. • When I called Misha, she **had heard** the news already.
do does did	*Do* is used to form the *emphatic tense*, which adds emphasis and can be used to create questions and negative expressions.	• Regardless of what Cam says, I **do have** a date for the prom. • **Does** she **have** a date? • Marlon definitely **did** not **ask** her to the dance.

Note that when *be* and *have* are used as helping verbs, the main verbs in the resulting verb phrases are altered—often by adding endings such as –*ing* (*am marry**ing***) or –*ed* (*have marri**ed***), respectively. When *do* is used as a helping verb, the main verb is used in its unaltered, or base, form—*do marry*.

The Modal Auxiliaries
In contrast to the varying forms of *be, have,* and *do,* the ten helping verbs known as the *modal auxiliaries,* or *modals,* do not change form to match their subjects. In addition, the verbs that they "help" do not change form when combined with the modals into verb phrases. The modal auxiliaries are used to express shades of meaning about possibility, willingness, and necessity. These meanings are explored further in the following table, which revisits Antonio's relationship with Griselda.

Modal	Example	Meaning
may	I *may marry* her.	*May* refers to permission or possibility. Antonio is allowed to marry Griselda, and there is a good chance that he will.
might	I *might marry* her.	*Might* refers to possibility. Here, Antonio's marrying Griselda is possible but not likely.
must	I *must marry* her.	*Must* refers to necessity. Due to some circumstance, perhaps because he made a promise to his dying mother, Antonio definitely has to marry Griselda.
can	I *can marry* her.	*Can* refers to present ability. In this case, neither Antonio nor Griselda is married, and they are old enough to marry; therefore, their marriage is able to occur but not planned.

could	I *could marry* her.	*Could* refers to conditional ability or permission. Antonio would be able or allowed to marry Griselda if circumstances were right. For instance, he could marry her if he weren't already married to Nina.
shall	I *shall marry* her.	*Shall* refers to polite intent. Here, Antonio is planning to marry his girlfriend in the future, and he is letting you know in a refined manner.
should	I *should marry* her.	*Should* refers to obligation. Here, Antonio would be doing the right thing if he married Griselda because she is delightful and they have been dating for so long.
will	I *will marry* her.	*Will* refers to future intent. In this case, Antonio is certain that he is going to marry her in the future.
would	I *would marry* her.	*Would* refers to conditional willingness. Antonio would be willing to marry Griselda under certain conditions—if, perhaps, her mother became less irritating.
ought to	I *ought to marry* her.	*Ought to* means that an act is the right thing to do. Here, Antonio would be making the right choice if he married Griselda.

Think About It

- What shades of meaning involving time, emphasis, possibility, willingness, and necessity do you need to add to your writing?
- What helping verbs—including the forms of *be, have,* and *do,* or the modal auxiliaries—can you use in your verb phrases to express those complex meanings?
- What changes must you make to the forms of your helping and main verbs to construct these verb phrases?

Remember that when you form a verb phrase, your choice of helping verb is crucial to your meaning. As in Antonio's case, selecting the right (or wrong) helping verb could have an effect as grave as committing to a marriage or leaving poor Griselda single and frustrated for years to come.

Infinitives

Chapter 5: Section 2, Lesson 13

Mark Twain once wrote, "It is better to keep your mouth closed and let people think you are a fool than to open it and remove all doubt." This passage contains infinitives: *to keep. . . and let* and *to open. . . and remove*. The infinitive. . . it means unending, right? In the mathematical sense, yes, it does, but in the grammatical sense, the meaning is quite different.

Defining Infinitives

An infinitive is the *to* form of a verb (*to ride, to grin, to benefit*). It can function in several ways: as a noun, adjective, or an adverb. When it acts as a noun, it can be the subject of a sentence, the direct object, or the subject complement, as in the following examples:

- Subject: **To go** *on the hike is Charlie's perfect dream.*
- Direct Object: *I want* **to bike**.
- Subject Complement: *Her desire is* **to dance**.
- Adjective: *She lost the will* **to survive.**
- Adverb: *Joe must run* **to win**.

Use infinitives to show intent, desires, or expectations that take place at the same time or later than the actions of the main verb.

- Intent: *Jenny was working as a nurse, but she quit* **to stay** *at home with her children*.
- Desire: **To take** *a nap was Joey's only wish after being up all night*.
- Expectation: *Only after being on the lake did Sam want* **to buy** *a boat for less than $400*.

Be careful to distinguish between an infinitive (*to* and the base verb form) and a prepositional phrase (*to* and a noun or pronoun).

- Infinitive Phrase (verbs): *to jump, to laugh, to spring, to rush*
- Prepositional Phrase (nouns or pronouns): *to the garden, to class, to her, to them*

Infinitive Phrases

An infinitive phrase is the infinitive and its modifiers (words like adjectives and adverbs that help describe the infinitive). The modifiers help to create a phrase that can be used anywhere you'd normally place a noun (direct object, subject, subject complement), adjective, or adverb.

- Direct Object: *Teachers needed* **to submit the grades early**.
  - *To submit the grades early* is the direct object of the verb needed.
  - *To submit* is the infinitive that functions as a direct object.
  - *Early* is the adverb describing **when** to submit.
  - *The grades* describes **what**—the direct object of the verb *to submit.*
- Subject: **To understand the story** *takes some time and dedication.*
- Adjective: *Minnie wanted the group* **to run before breakfast.**
- Adverb: **To build a relationship**, *two people must spend much time together.*

Punctuation

If the infinitive is used as an adverb and is the beginning phrase in a sentence, set

it off with a comma; otherwise, no punctuation is needed for an infinitive phrase. Consider the commas that set off these infinitive phrases:

- *To see a baby bird in the nest, Jodi had to climb into the tree*.
- *To improve your singing, you must breathe from your diaphragm*.

However, with the infinitive phrase at the end, no comma is needed: *You must breathe from your diaphragm to improve your singing.* Similarly, if the infinitive acts as the subject, a comma isn't used: *To see a baby bird in the nest renewed my hope for an early spring.*

Bare Infinitives
The bare infinitive does not include the *to.* Many people cite this form when they identify a verb, as in "This is the verb *to shout*," although *to* is not part of the verb:

- To- infinitive: *Help me **to save** the bear*.
- Bare infinitive: *Help me **save** the bear*.

Bare infinitives are used after modals, such as *shall, should, will, would, may, might, must, do, did, can, could,* and, sometimes, *need:*

- *I can **stay** overnight with my friends*.
- *Mary will **take** the test after class*.
- *Greg would **stay**, but he has chores to do*.

Bare infinitives are also used after *had better* and *would rather:*

- *He had better **run** before the wolf catches his heels.*
- *Jenny would rather **dance** than sing.*

Some other examples include

- *We saw them **wave** to the crowd.*
- *My daughter's poem made me **cry**.*
- *Why **run** when you can drive*?

Split Infinitives
Split infinitives occur when words are included between *to* and the verb in an infinitive. Many readers don't mind if a single adverb splits the infinitive, but it's still best to avoiding splitting infinitives in formal writing.

- Informal: *I like **to** on a nice day **walk** in the woods.* (Too many words separate *to* and *walk*.)
  Formal: *On a nice day, I like **to walk** in the woods.*
- Informal: *I needed **to** quickly **gather** my personal possessions.* (A single adverb splits the infinitive.)
  Formal: *I needed **to gather** my personal possessions quickly.*

Think About It

- Which verbs might be revised to become infinitives?
- When are commas needed after infinitive phrases that begin sentences?
- What spots would benefit from using bare infinitives?
- Where do you have split infinitives to revise?

An infinitive is the word *to* and the base form of a verb that functions as a noun (subject, direct object, subject complement) or as an adjective or adverb. Infinitives can appear without *to* or as infinitive phrases, and they should not be split in formal writing.

Participles

Chapter 5: Section 2, Lesson 14

Adjectives and verbs are taught as separate parts of speech, but they actually have a symbiotic relationship. A participle, for instance, is an adjective made from a verb. While verbs signify actions and states of being, participles describe nouns and pronouns. There are two kinds of participles—*present* (often called *active*) *participles* and *past* (often called *passive*) *participles.* These adjectives can be single words—*participles*—or multi-word phrases—*participial phrases.*

Present Participles
Present participles start with the base form of a verb. You can think of the base form as the verb in its simplest form, or the word you would find if you looked up the verb in the dictionary. For example, the base form of the verb *to be* is *be*, of *to break* is *break*.

Present participles are formed by adding -*ing* to the base form of the verb. The present participle of the verb *to work* is *working*; the present participle of the verb *to lose* is *losing*.

Like all adjectives, the present participle describes a noun or pronoun. The present participle is used when the noun or pronoun is doing or being something:

- the **running** man
- an **exciting** movie
- a **discouraging** report

The active participle is sometimes called the *present participle* when it is used with the verb *to be*:

- She **was screaming** with excitement.
- We **are hurtling** toward destruction.
- My basset **will be foraging** for breakfast at dawn.

In these constructions, the participle describes the subject of the clause—which is, of course, a noun or pronoun. In the third example above, *foraging* is the participle that describes *basset*. Using present participles with the verb *to be* is sometimes referred to as the progressive verb tense. *Was sponging* (above) is past progressive; *are hurtling* is present progressive; *will be foraging* is future progressive. Whether you think of *was sponging* as the past progressive tense or as the use of the present participle with the verb *to be*, the logic of the construction is exactly the same. More on these distinctions is found in Verb Tenses: Progressive and Perfect.

(Present participles must not be confused with **gerunds**, which are also formed by adding -*ing* to the verb's base form. Gerunds function as **nouns**, not adjectives. In the sentence *The man loves running*, the gerund *running* is a noun, the direct object of the verb *loves*. In *The foraging basset hound loves eating*, *foraging* is a participle, while *eating* is a gerund. To learn more, please see Gerunds.)

Past Participles
Regular past participles are formed by adding -*ed* to the base form of regular verbs. If you don't know the past participle of an irregular verb, you can look it up in a good dictionary, which will list the present and past forms of the verb as well as the past participle, or you can refer to Irregular Verbs in the Appendix. For example, the past tense of the irregular verb *to do* is *did*, while its past participle

is *done.* (Of course, its present participle is *doing,* formed by adding *-ing* to its base form, but no such strategy will reveal its past participle.)

Like all participles, the past participle describes a noun or pronoun. The past participle is used when the noun or pronoun is being acted upon in some way:

- the **exhausted** man
- the **excited** audience
- a **discouraged** reporter

In the above examples, something or someone has exhausted the man, excited the audience, and discouraged the reporter. Always keep in mind that the active/passive distinction is huge: Any performer would love to be **electrifying** (active); no performer wants to be **electrified** (passive)*.*

When the past participle is used with the verb *to be*, the result is the passive voice:

- Milk **was sponged** off the countertop.
- We **are doomed.**
- At dawn, a box of dog biscuits **will be consumed.**

To find out more about the passive voice, refer to [Active and Passive Voice](#).

Participles in Sentence Structure
Like other adjectives, participles usually precede the noun or pronoun they modify:

- the **blossoming** flower
- the **freezing** cold
- the **melted** popsicle

But if the present participle takes a direct object (which it can do, since it's made from a verb) or if the present or past participle is part of a verbal phrase, it should be placed *after* the noun or pronoun it modifies:

- All adults **carrying small children** should exit first.
- The flower **blossoming in spring** should be snipped in early morning.
- A small dog **frightened by fireworks** ran out into the street.

Or if it precedes the noun or pronoun it modifies, the participle should be set off by a comma:

- **Carrying their small children**, a few adults quickly exited the plane.
- **Blossoming in early spring**, the crocus is always a welcome sight.
- **Concerned about the welfare of my horse**, I called my local fire department.

Think About It

- Which noun or pronoun will your participle describe?
- How can knowing the base form of the verb help you form participles correctly?
- If the verb is irregular, what is its past participle?
- Where will you place that participle or participial phrase in your sentence?

Participles enable you to use verbs—words denoting acting and being—as

adjectives, thus enlivening your language and enriching your powers of description.

End Punctuation

Chapter 5: Section 3, Lesson 1

What if writers didn't use periods, question marks, or exclamation points? While it might sound nice to save a few keystrokes, written sentences without end punctuation wouldn't communicate your ideas clearly. Try this sentence: *You wrecked the car*

It's hard to know how to interpret the sentence without punctuation. Now try it again:

You wrecked the car? (Really—that was you?)
You wrecked the car! (I can't believe it—this is terrible!)
You wrecked the car. (Yes, I saw you do it.)

Despite the prevalence of the interrobang (?!), there really are only three options for ending your sentences in academic writing: question mark (?), exclamation point (!), and period (.) Using these marks shows readers that your sentences are complete and helps them interpret your meaning.

Standard End Punctuation

A **period** indicates the ending of a statement (which is why it's called a "full stop" in some places). A **question mark** shows that the sentence is a question (or an interrogative), not a statement. An **exclamation point** is used for an expression mixed with strong emotion. Check out all three:

All the movies ended at the same time?
All the movies ended at the same time!
All the movies ended at the same time.

Each form of end punctuation changes the meaning of the sentence. In the first sentence, the speaker is questioning or indicating disbelief. In the second sentence, the speaker is showing strong emotions—perhaps surprise or anger. In the final sentence, the speaker is simply making a statement. The best way for readers to know which of these meanings you're trying to communicate is to tell them through your choice of end punctuation.

End Punctuation with Quotation Marks

When quoting phrases that do not need in-text citations or when using dialogue, you'll find that sometimes the end of a sentence also includes quotation marks.

A period always appears inside the quotation marks:

Mom always says something wise, like "Time will tell."
The shovel salesperson said gravely, "Winter is coming."

But the placement of question marks and exclamation points depends on the context. If the quotation itself is a question, the end punctuation goes inside:

"Do you believe in extraterrestrials?"

But sometimes the material inside quotation marks is part of a larger sentence like this:

Did you read the letter in which King wrote, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to

justice everywhere"?

Here, the quoted material isn't a question, but the sentence is a question, so the end punctuation is added outside the quotation marks. To find out more, see [Quotation Marks](#).

End Punctuation with Parentheses
When you use parentheses to enclose citations or add extra material to your sentence, the placement of end punctuation again depends on the context. In-text citations that appear at ends of sentences always come before the period, not after:

The study found that 38% of participants were very unhappy with the service (Jones, 2014).

You may also include parentheses to show that details have been added to further explain something within the sentence:

The scientific expedition ended when it encountered militant members of the Earth Liberation Front (ELF).

In less formal writing, you may see a full sentence within parentheses:

My mother (she's my hero) taught me not to complain.

My mother (do I sound like her?) taught me not to complain.

Notice that a period is not included mid-sentence, but a question mark or exclamation point would be. For more information on using parentheses correctly, check out the discussion on [Hyphens and Parentheses](#).

Other Sentence Endings
Very rarely, and mostly in narratives, you might end sentences other ways to show specific things. Here's an exchange between two characters in a story:

"I wonder . . . " (The ellipsis [three periods] shows the speaker is pausing, thinking, or perhaps confused.)

"Do you think—" (The dash indicates that the speaker has been cut off mid-sentence.)

Note: These are extremely rare cases of end punctuation; use them only in narratives, and rarely even then. See [Dashes, Slashes, Brackets, and Ellipses](#) to learn more about other sentence endings.

End Punctuation Mistakes
One common mistake is overuse of the exclamation point. Consider this note from a supervisor to employees:

The stapler is missing again! If you have seen the stapler, please return it!

Readers often perceive the exclamation point as yelling, and if overused, it certainly comes across that way. Use exclamation points exceedingly sparingly—reserving them mostly for stories.

A second common mistake is the question that's not really a question. It looks like

this:

I wonder if aliens really built the pyramids?

Some writers get confused by *wonder* and assume that this is a question. Although it could be reworded as a question (*Did aliens really build the pyramids?*), it is currently a statement and should receive a period for end punctuation: *I wonder if aliens really built the pyramids.*

Here's another example:

The explorer asked if the person he'd met was named Livingston.

The sentence is about someone asking a question, but it's still not actually a question; therefore, the period is correct.

Think About It

- Check for sentences missing end punctuation; what do you need to add?
- Where do you see sentences that are really questions and need to end with question marks?
- Where might exclamation points be overused that could negatively impact your reader?

End punctuation isn't optional in academic writing. You might leave out the periods when sending a text, but college writing requires precision, and end punctuation helps ensure it.

Colons

Far from just being the first part of a smiley face :), a **colon** is a punctuation mark that helps writers present explanations, showcase examples, or separate elements in some way. However, the colon most often is misused or misunderstood when it comes to sentence development. Essentially, a colon is a visual cue to the reader that *what follows the colon is significant.* For example, you might want to provide a definition of an idea:

*Her new phone had 32 gigabytes of data storage**:** a capacity roughly equivalent to 32 billion bytes.*

A colon tells readers what follows it will be an explanation, clarification, definition, or emphasis. Essentially, the colon says, "Hey, there's important information coming!"

Ways You Can Use a Colon
Creating Lists
A colon can help you present a list or series of ideas.

*Before you venture out into the storm, you're going to need several things**:** a waterproof poncho, an umbrella, rubber boots, a flashlight, and some rope.*

Clarifying and Defining
A colon can also serve as a visual cue for a definition or clarification of an idea.

*The storm was identified on Doppler radar**:** a device that uses radio waves to identify weather conditions.*

Quoting Independent Clauses
If you want to present a quotation that's an independent clause (complete sentence), you can opt to use the colon to introduce the quotation.

*In 1961, President John F. Kennedy included words in his inaugural address that are still good advice for most Americans today**:** "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country."*

To learn more about correcting quoting material, see [Quotation Marks](#).

Emphasizing or Summarizing Points
A colon can also be used to show emphasis or summary in the idea that follows it.

- *There is only one way to respond to that**:** Yikes!*
- *I want you to know this: You're not going to get away with everything.*

How to Know When to Use a Colon (or Not)
One generally safe way to use a colon is if you're going to create a list or series of ideas and the clause that comes *before* the colon is an independent clause. Consider this example:

There are several issues pertaining to classroom management: *the extent of professionalism of policy in the contexts of voice, dress, and style; the consistency of teacher follow-through from the beginning of the school year to the end; and the depth and breadth of administrative support, including ISS and OSS*

protocol.

The information in **bold** (before the colon) could stand alone as a sentence, so it's independent. The addition of the list of ideas provides clarification of what the writer means by *several issues*.

Using a colon (or not) can reflect stylistic choices, depending on the kind of writing you're doing. In an academic paper, for example, the colon is generally a better choice than an em dash (—), although the two accomplish the same task. Compare these examples:

*Students use many forms of social media**:** Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and Facebook.*	In a research paper, the use of a colon is more appropriate as it's a more formal form of punctuation.
My students use many social networking apps —simple, user-friendly ways to talk to friends and meet people.	An em dash provides the same clarification of ideas, here, but it is more informal and would most likely work better on a blog post or personal reflection type of paper.
*Students use many social networking applications**, which are** simple, user-friendly, and fun.*	If the list is easy to follow, a colon may not be necessary at all.

More Ways to Use a Colon
The examples above are focused on how to use colons in sentence structures, but you'll also use them in different ways when writing papers. Here are just a few colon uses that you may encounter.

Presenting Time
You may not have noticed that a colon is part of telling time, as in, *It's 5:00.*

Separating Titles and Subtitles
Avengers: Age of Ultron
Neil Postman: American Educator, Media Theorist, and Social Critic

Writing Lines of Dialogue in a Play
CARRIE: Oh, my gosh! I'm so excited!!

MRS. SMITH: What? What?!

CARRIE: I got an A on my Physics final!

Think About It

- How do my ideas relate to one another?
- What role or function does my colon have (clarifying, emphasizing, presenting a list or quotation)?
- What is the general tone and purpose for my writing?
- How will I need to use a colon if I'm referencing sources?

These questions will help you decide whether a colon is the best choice for your sentence, title, or citation.

Semicolons

Chapter 5: Section 3, Lesson 3

One punctuation mark that can sometimes be confusing is the *semicolon*. It's helpful to think of it as a tough punctuation mark that is strong enough to *hold two complete thoughts together* or to *separatelong or complicated items in a list.*

Connecting Ideas
Joining ideas to show how they connect or relate to each other is an effective way to show relationships. A semicolon can carry the weight of two ideas held in separate independent clauses. For example,

*Marcel's boss was unethical**;** she would make him work extra shifts without pay.*

Here, the writer wanted to show a close relationship between these two ideas:
Marcel's boss was unethical
she would make him work extra shifts without pay

Notice that each idea is an independent clause stating a complete idea. The writer could say,

*Marcel's boss was unethical**.** She would make him work extra shifts without pay.*

By separating the two thoughts with a period, the writer has added a bit of distance between them. Connecting the statements with a semicolon bridges that distance and makes the ideas seem closer. If you want the reader to see the connection you see, use a semicolon to make that happen.

Separating Ideas
Semicolons can also help separate a long list of ideas within a single statement. Here's an example:

Students decide to pursue a medical career for various reasons, including the consistent field base, which is hard to find in other careers; the potential for advancement, with or without on-going education; a salary commensurate with duties and responsibilities—equally hard to find; and the satisfaction of being able to help others in need.

That's a pretty long list of ideas, many with commas or dashes of their own setting apart additional detail. The semicolon separates those ideas by creating a brief stop between each item.

Using a Semicolon Correctly
If you're joining sentences, put your semicolon to a balancing test. Your goal is to make sure that you have an independent clause on each side of the semicolon, like this:

independent clause; *independent clause*

Let's see how it works with this example:

*Although Skyrim is a great game**;** I like Guitar Hero better.*

In this example, *Although Skyrim is a great game* is NOT an independent clause. It's a dependent clause; it wouldn't make sense all by itself (learn more about these clauses at [Dependent Clauses](#)). However, *I like Guitar Hero better* is an independent clause. Because the two clauses are different, the semicolon can't be

used to balance the ideas. Instead, you need to either revise to be sure both sides of the semicolon are independent clauses or avoid using a semicolon. Here are two possibilities:

Semicolon: *Although Skyrim is a great game, it has too many levels; I like Guitar Hero better.*
No semicolon: *Although Skyrim is a great game, I like Guitar Hero better.*

You can also avoid mistaken identity. Sometimes, writers confuse the colon (**:**) and the semicolon (**;**), especially when developing a list. Either a colon or a signal term (*like, for example, such as*, *are*) can introduce a list, but a semicolon cannot. A colon works when signal terms aren't used, as in this example:

We must make sure to get things like pizza, hot dogs, and pineapple before the party.
John asked us to pick up the following items: lemon syrup, syrup of ipecac, and rose water.

To find out more about punctuating lists like this one, see [Colons](#).

Semicolons and Conjunctive Adverbs
Semicolons effectively combine sentences when used with a conjunctive adverb or transition that clearly expresses the relationship between two ideas. These transitional words can express relationships such as *contrast, cause/effect,* and *addition*. For example:

- **Contrast:** *My friend loves to go to karaoke;* **however***, he can't carry a tune.*
- **Cause/Effect:** *Everyone is a target for advertisers;* **therefore***, it's important to understand the rhetorical appeals.*
- **Addition:** *Her whisper was quite loud;* **accordingly***, everyone studying in the library heard her.*

Think About It

- Where will a semicolon help indicate a close relationship between two independent clauses?
- Where could you use a semicolon to separate complicated lists?
- Which clauses need a semicolon and conjunctive adverb to connect them?

Your answers to these questions will help you best determine whether your usage of the semicolon is effective and purposeful.

Commas

Chapter 5: Section 3, Lesson 4

Writing without using commas is a bit like building a road without putting up street signs: People tend to get confused and lost without directions. Commas help readers by directing them—showing them how to read and when to pause and keeping ideas separate from one another. Just imagine a world with no commas: *I like cooking my family and my pets.*

Disturbing, right? Now try it with commas: *I like cooking, my family, and my pets.*

Whew! That's better. While there are many scenarios in which commas are used, some situations are more common than others.

Separate Items in a Series
Use commas to separate words, phrases, or clauses listed in a series, including a comma after each item except the last: *I like using peanut butter, cookies, and whipped cream to make milkshakes.*

Without commas, the list means something different: *I like using peanut butter cookies and whipped cream to make milkshakes.*

This rule applies not just to lists of words but also to lists of phrases and clauses: *My parents hoped that I'd go to college, finish my degree, and get a good job.*

Depending on your background, you may wish to omit the final comma in the list. Please note that the final comma is *never* incorrect, but omitting it can sometimes create confusion: *The magazine features stories about circus performers pursuing their dreams, a little league baseball team and a kangaroo at the Cincinnati Zoo.*

Without a second comma, it sounds like the circus performers dream of baseball teams and kangaroos. With the comma, it's clear that these are three separate stories: *The magazine features stories about circus performers pursuing their dreams, a little league baseball team, and a kangaroo at the Cincinnati Zoo.*

Join Complete Sentences Separated by Conjunctions
Some conjunctions are used to connect two complete sentences. These include *for, and, nor, but, or, yet,* and *so.* When one of these conjunctions (called **coordinating conjunctions**) connects two complete sentences, a comma is added before the conjunction, as in these examples:

- *Those circus performers are odd, but I do like kangaroos.*
- *I am scared of heights, so I will never join the circus.*

Another category of conjunctions is **conjunctive adverbs**. These include words like *furthermore, however,* and *therefore.* They're also used to connect two complete sentences, but the punctuation is a bit trickier because the adverb is also part of the second sentence. Start with this example: *However, the Forbidden Forest is even scarier.*

This sentence has an introductory word, so a comma is added. Now look at this compound sentence: *Being pursued by bandits is frightening; however, the Forbidden Forest is even scarier.*

The semicolon is added to show where two sentences meet. (For more examples

like this one, see [Semicolons](#).) The comma is still required after *however* because it's part of the second sentence. Here's another example with a conjunctive adverb: *The forest is home to strange rodents;* **moreover***, it contains hidden dangers like quicksand.* For more on using commas in these ways, see [Conjunctions](#).

Separate Introductory Elements from the Main Sentence
Words, phrases, and clauses placed before the main clause of a sentence are known as *introductory elements*. Most often, these introductory elements tell when, where, why, or how the action occurred. A comma shows readers that the introductory element has ended and the main sentence will follow:

- **Finally***, we arrived at the moon base.* (The introductory word tells *when.)*
- **In the morning***, we drank Tang.* (The introductory phrase tells when.*)*
- **Because we'd survived the zombie apocalypse***, we jumped up and down.* (The introductory clause tells *why*.)

Without the comma, the introductory part and main sentence can run together and become confusing: *Next to the moon base headquarters was set up.*

Now try it again with a comma after the introductory element: *Next to the moon base, headquarters was set up.*

Often, writers struggle to decide where to add the comma when the introductory element is a longer phrase or clause. This sentence includes a comma in the correct spot: *Although life on the moon is difficult, it's better than living in fear all the time.*

And here's the same sentence with the comma placed **incorrectly:** *Although, life on the moon is difficult it's better than living in fear all the time.*

Avoid this error by waiting until the end of the introductory element to add a comma.

Separate Nonessential Parts from Essential Parts
Groups of words that aren't necessary for a complete sentence are known as *nonessential* (or *nonrestrictive*) elements. Generally, these nonessential elements provide additional description of nouns and pronouns:

- *The patient felt better after his surgery,* **a new procedure not approved by the FDA***.*
- *The surgery,* **which lasted three hours***, was a success.*
- *My mother,* **a registered nurse***, warned me about taking medicine from strangers.*

In these sentences, the underlined parts provide additional information, but these parts are not essential to create grammatically complete sentences. You could remove them and you'd still have complete sentences; plus, the meaning is still pretty clear. Because of this, the commas are needed to show that the elements are not essential.

Sometimes, a particular word can suggest whether a group of words is nonessential or essential. Usually, the word *which* is used to begin a group of words not essential to understanding a sentence: *The phone,* **which had a shrill tone***, rang incessantly*.

The nonessential phrase is introduced by *which,* so commas *are* needed.

The word *that* is used with a phrase or clause absolutely essential to understanding the meaning of a sentence: *The phone **that connected her home office to her company's headquarters** rang incessantly.*

The essential phrase is introduced by *that,* so *no* commas are needed. Without the underlined information, we don't know that a particular phone is ringing.

Separate Coordinate Adjectives
When two adjectives describe the same noun and are placed next to each other, commas separate them:

- *The hot, smoky room absolutely took my breath away.*
- *She was an enthusiastic, energetic moderator.*

But sometimes, back-to-back adjectives are not coordinate adjectives, meaning they don't describe the noun that follows equally:

- *The tall oak tree.* (*Tall* describes *oak tree*, not just *tree.*)
- *My little lost puppy.* (*Little* describes *lost puppy*, not just *puppy*.)

Fortunately, you can use a trick to determine if a comma is needed between two adjectives. If you can replace the comma with *and*, the comma is necessary:

- *The hot and smoky room*
- But **not** *the tall and oak tree*

Commas with Dialogue
If you've written a short story or narrative, you already know dialogue requires that you pay close attention to punctuation. Consider this brief exchange between two characters in a story:

"Do you know what I've just found out, Holmes?" said Watson.
"No, but I suppose you'll tell me anyway," replied Holmes.
"I've discovered," answered the doctor, "that we are international sensations!"
Sherlock thought for a moment and responded, "Very nice. Now pass me that bottle, Watson."

As you've noticed, a comma marks the boundaries between narration and dialogue, unless a question mark or exclamation point is used, such as in the first sentence.

Common Errors
One common mistake writers make with commas is the comma splice—when two complete sentences are joined by only a comma, like this: *The hippopotamus swam to the shore nearby, the tourists became nervous.*

Commas by themselves cannot join two complete sentences. You can fix comma splices several ways:

- Add a period to create a hard break: *The hippopotamus swam to the shore nearby. The tourists became nervous.*
- Add a semicolon to keep the ideas connected: *The hippopotamus swam to the shore nearby; the tourists became nervous.*

- Add a conjunction to join the ideas even more closely: *The hippopotamus swam to the shore nearby, so the tourists became nervous.*

Another common mistake is adding a comma between the subject and main verb of a sentence. Unless you're setting apart a nonessential element, a comma won't split the subject and verb. Let's look:

- Incorrect: *My mother, screamed when she saw the big spider.*
- Correct: *My mother screamed when she saw the big spider.*
- Correct: *My mother, who always feared bugs, screamed when she saw the spider.*

Find more examples on revising common comma errors in [Top 10 Writing Concerns](#).

Think About It

- Where in your essay have you used introductory elements that need to be separated from the main sentences by commas?
- Look for coordinating conjunctions; where are you using them to separate sentences or lists?
- Looking at your essay, which other comma rules will help with revision?

Commas make your writing easier for readers to understand. While it can be frustrating to learn the many rules, the results are clearer writing and a stronger message.

Apostrophes

Did you know that the space shuttle Challenger exploded because of the faulty design of an o-ring? A small part caused the undoing of such a massive piece of machinery. Similarly, apostrophes, though tiny, can cause writers a ton of trouble. Part of the issue is their multiple uses—apostrophes are used both in contractions (*They're here*) and to show possession or ownership (*The zombie's car is red*).

Apostrophes in Contractions
Contractions are those shortened words that you use all the time in speaking, but which you are discouraged from using in formal writing.

- *What's up?* (*What is up?*)
- *How's it going?* (*How is it going?*)
- *I've seen three zombies today!* (*I have seen three zombies today!*)

Other common contractions include the following: *don't* (*do not*); *aren't* (*are not*); *can't* (*can not*); *it's* (*it is*) *and I'm* (*I am*).

Remember that you won't use contractions in formal writing assignments, though they are acceptable in stories and poetry.

Apostrophes Showing Possession
Apostrophes also help show possession or ownership, indicating when a person, place, or thing possesses or owns another.

- *The man's shovel* (*The man owns the shovel.*)
- *Canada's border* (*Canada has a border.*)
- *The zombie's keys* (*The zombie possesses the keys.*)

Notice all these nouns (*man*, *Canada*, and *zombie*) are singular. With a singular possessive word, the apostrophe is added before an *–s.* You can also show possession with plural words.

- *The boys' bikes* (*Several boys possess bikes.*)
- *States' laws* (*Many states have laws.*)
- *The zombies' keys* (*There are lots of zombies, and they all have keys!*)

With these examples, the plural word is written, and an apostrophe is added afterward. But what if a word is plural but doesn't end in *–s*, such as *children, women,* or *people*?

- *Children's toys*
- *Women's shoes*
- *People's screams*

In each of these cases, the plural word is written, followed by an *–'s* to show possession. If you switch them to singular words, they look like this:

- *Child's toys*
- *Woman's shoes*
- *Person's screams*

So the placement of the apostrophe depends completely on whether the word is

singular or plural. Let's look more closely at how this placement can change the meaning of a sentence:

- The **zombie's teeth** *are sharp.* (This is singular possessive. There's just one zombie—you can handle this!)
- The **zombies' teeth** *are sharp.* (Now it's plural possessive. Many zombies —run!)

Sometimes, you'll need apostrophes with compound nouns, such as *mother-in-law* or *ambassador general*. The rules are the same:

- *My mother-in-law's minivan is parked in the driveway.*
- *The ambassador general's BMW is parked next to it.*

Apostrophes and Indefinite Pronouns
Indefinite pronouns that need to be made possessive can confuse writers. Examples of indefinite pronouns include *anybody, nobody, someone, everyone,* and *everything.*

The possessive forms are written this way: *anybody's, nobody's, someone's, everyone's,* and *everything's.*

Please note that indefinite pronouns are often used in contractions too:

- *Someone's been here already.* (Someone has been here already.)
- *I just saw someone's footprints.* (The footprints belong to someone.)

Apostrophes and Collective Possession
Sometimes, you need to show that two people own the same thing. Let's say one chainsaw belongs to Shaun *and* Peter. You would write it these ways to show possession: *Shaun and Peter's chainsaw* or *Peter and Shaun's chainsaw.* But let's say Shaun and Peter both have their own chainsaws. Now it's written like this: *Shaun's and Peter's chainsaws.*

Common Apostrophe Errors
Apostrophes are **not** used to make words plural. Check out these common errors:

- Incorrect: *The 1980's had the best cartoons.*
- Correct: *The 1980s had the best cartoons.*

- Incorrect: *I got two B's on my report card.*
- Correct: *I got two Bs on my report card.*

- Incorrect: *I am selling DVD's and CD's.*
- Correct: *I am selling DVDs and CDs.*

Also, apostrophes are **not** used with personal pronouns. These include words like *yours, mine, ours, its, his, hers,* and *theirs.* The words are already possessive, so the addition of an apostrophe is unnecessary. These examples show correct use of personal pronouns:

- *Is that **your** car?*
- *Yes, is that one **yours**?*
- *The cat is not in **its** cage.*
- *Did the zombies take **their** keys?*

- *No, **theirs** are on the table.*

Think About It

- What directions has your instructor given about using contractions?
- Where have you used plural words that you might need to check for misplaced apostrophes?
- With each apostrophe you've used to show possession, ask yourself: Is this a singular or plural possessive?

You'll use apostrophes in just about every type of writing since possessive words and contractions are very common. Don't feel shy about coming back to review the rules—there are plenty to remember!

Quotation Marks

Chapter 5: Section 3, Lesson 6

You've probably seen people put air quotes around words to signal discomfort with something they are discussing, but when are quotes most commonly used? The short answer is that quotes are generally used to show readers where you're using the exact wording of another person or another source. Using quotation marks around outside sources helps you avoid being accused of plagiarism because they show readers that you're not appropriating someone else's language as your own.

Using Outside Sources
When you incorporate ideas from outside source material (books, articles you find online or in print publications, web pages, and other printed material), you'll most likely need to use quotation marks.

Quotation Marks for Direct Quotes
When you use another source's exact words in your own writing, you'll use quotation marks to show that you're directly quoting that source:

The article by Robert Draper, published recently in *The New York Times's* travel section, began when Draper wrote, "The man in the Khaki vest slurped noisily from his cup, descended briefly into scowling meditation, spat the contents into the sink and then unleashed a torrent of approving descriptors."

This direct quotation from *The New York Times* article is noted with a set of quotation marks, showing readers where the writer's words stop and the outside source's words begin. The quoted sentence begins with a capital letter because the quotation starts at the beginning of the quoted source's sentence. If the quotation had consisted of only a selection that happened to start mid-sentence, the quotation would not begin with a capital letter:

The article "In the Hills of Sri Lanka's Tea Country" by Robert Draper begins with the author describing a tea connoisseur testing a local brew. After an initial sampling, he "descended briefly into scowling meditation, spat the contents into the sink, and then unleashed a torrent of approving descriptors."

For more on using capital letters with quotations, see Capitalization.

Quotation Marks for Titles
You'll also use quotation marks for the title of a work that's part of a larger compilation:

The article "In the Hills of Sri Lanka's Tea Country" by Robert Draper begins with the author describing a tea connoisseur testing a local brew.

Because the article "In the Hills of Sri Lanka's Tea Country" is part of a larger compilation of articles found in *The New York Times*, it's placed in quotation marks. You would do the same with other sources found in more lengthy publications, like these:

- short story
- a song
- a poem
- a magazine article

Quotation Marks for Irony

Rely on quotation marks when you use words ironically or with a great deal of reservation:

According to some opponents of standardized tests, the "failure" to include those tests in the curriculum has resulted in a decrease in the drop-out rate among high school sophomores and juniors.

Because the writer is using *failure* to mean the opposite of what it actually does, quotation marks denote the ironic use of the word.

Punctuation Within or Around Quotation Marks
From commas to semicolons and colons to brackets, various types of punctuation are placed differently alongside quotation marks.

- **Commas and periods should go inside quotation marks:** When we passed through the tunnel, the tour guide told us to "hold on to your hats" and to "keep your hands inside the windows."
- **Semicolons and colons should go outside quotation marks:** The governor was adamant about what she called "the worst cover up in state history": "No institution, public or private," she said, "has the right to deny citizens of this state access to due process"; ". . . it is a violation of the constitution," she added.
- **Ellipses show where words have been left out of a quotation in an attempt to shorten it:** The critic surmises that the protagonist is pitted against "the whimsies of nature . . . and the unpredictable behavior of the dictator's government" in the small island nation where the story is set. For more on this topic, see Dashes, Slashes, Brackets, and Ellipses.
- **Brackets go inside quotation marks and indicate misspellings or misused language, or add context to the quotation:**
    o The author of the tract was adamant in his opposition: "It [the mine] will ruin our fisheries, destroy our riparian habitat, and poison the gulf [of Fundy] with carcinogens."
    o The spokesperson for the public relations firm was convinced that the football game's officials had "favered [sic] one team over the other, based on the final flurry of calls at the end of the game." Above, the word *sic* in brackets is Latin for *thus* or *so it is*; it indicates to readers that the writer has taken words exactly from the text (spelling error and all) without changing them.

- **Single quotes are used when you're including a quotation that has another quotation inside of it:** In the article on the basketball game, the sports writer quotes one of the starting forwards, who discussed the reason behind the victory: "Starting forward James Quincy noted the success was due to 'out rebounding on the offensive end of the floor' and 'blocking shots on the defensive end.'"
- **Quotation marks are NOT needed when you're using a word as itself or to mean itself. Instead, use italics:**
    o If you write *epistemology*, will readers understand what that means?
    Here, the word is being written as itself—it's not being used ironically. It's also not taken from another's text and being used in this one. Therefore, no quotation marks are needed.

Think About It

- What are your reasons for using quotation marks in your draft?
- How successful have you been in showing readers where you've used

someone else's exact words?
- What punctuation have you used around quotation marks, and how have you formatted it?

Go back to your draft with these questions in mind; check your use of quotation marks throughout to make sure you're using them correctly and avoiding any instances of plagiarism.

Hyphens and Parentheses

Chapter 5: Section 3, Lesson 7

Setting complex concepts or ideas apart from each other can make them easier to understand, but some concepts have to be spliced together in order to be fully understood. Two forms of punctuation—parentheses and hyphens—can signal separating or splicing to readers. Parentheses set ideas aside so that they can be considered independently of one another, and hyphens splice them together to be thought of all at once. The discussion below outlines some general, widely accepted guidelines for both hyphens and parentheses.

Hyphens

Generally speaking, hyphens are used to connect two or more words or numbers to create a single idea. Hyphens are especially useful when creating adjectives. If a compound adjective you're writing can't be misread, though, you most likely don't need a hyphen. For example, concepts like *grade point average* are widely understood and don't generally create confusion, so they don't need to be hyphenated. Here, though, are some generally accepted guidelines for using hyphens:

Hyphenate two words being used as a single adjective (or a word describing a noun) if that adjective comes before the noun:

- ***Well-dressed*** *individuals typically do well at job interviews.*
- *The **under-performing** products typically don't sell well.*
- *It is a **crude-oil** processing refinery.*

Keep in mind, though, that when two words describing a noun come after it, they are *not* hyphenated:

- *Individuals who are **well dressed** do well at job interviews.*
- *Products that are **under performing** typically don't sell well.*

Hyphenate compound numbers:

- *The man, who was **thirty-seven** years old, did well even though the younger people didn't think he would.*

Use hyphens to avoid confusion:

- *He needs to **re-sign** (*vs. resign*) the documents so that people can see the mark is clearly his.*
- *There is so much to cook for the party that I need to **pre-fix** (vs. prefix) the entree this morning.*

Use hyphens with words that begin with the prefixes *ex-* (meaning former), *self-*, and *all-*.

- *ex-wife*
- *self-inflicted*
- *all-encompassing*

Also, use hyphens when the suffix *-elect* comes at the end of a word.

- *president-elect*

When you combine a prefix and a capitalized word, use a hyphen:

- *mid-October*
- *anti-United States*

Use a hyphen when you combine figures like dates with prefixes.

- *mid-1990s*

In addition, use a hyphen when you include a prefix that ends with the same letter the base word begins with:

- *anti-intellectual*

Use a hyphen to divide a word at the end of a line, but only break the word between syllables. The word *individual* can be broken into the following syllables: *in-di-vid-u-al*. When you use it at the end of a line and need to break it up with a hyphen you might do the following:

- *The new laws compromise the worth and dignity of many of the hardworking in-*
  dividuals that are a part of the nation.

Finally, when dividing already hyphenated words, such as *meta-analysis*, because of a line break, divide the word at the hyphen only.

- *The book is so complex scholars provide analysis of its analysis. The meta-*
  analysis is hard for many readers to grasp.

Parentheses
Parentheses are typically used to include information that's helpful or interesting but which isn't necessary to understand the sentence's meaning. There are widely accepted guidelines for using parentheses in your writing.

The asides parentheses often include additional information, clarify a concept, or otherwise share information that wouldn't fit into the flow of the sentence:

- *Her methodical work (she spent at least three hours on each spreadsheet) was enough to earn her a big raise at the end of the year.*

Additionally, you can include information that's an aside or otherwise not particularly relevant to the thought being expressed in the sentence:

- *George's letter (which was beautifully written, by the way) helped to get the group out of trouble with the school administration.*

You can also use parentheses to separate letters or numbers from the rest of the sentence when listing out the steps of a process:

- *To change a car tire, follow these steps: (a) pull off the hubcap and loosen the lug nuts on the flat; (b) locate the tire jack in your vehicle and place it just behind or just in front of the flat tire; (c) jack the tire off the ground; (d)*

remove the loosened lug nuts and put them in the hub cap or someplace where they won't be lost or scattered; (e) remove the flat tire from the vehicle and put the spare in its place; and (f) tighten the lug nuts in an even fashion before replacing the hubcap and lowering the spare tire to the ground.

To punctuate writing inside parentheses, use these guidelines:

- For statements written inside parentheses (complete sentences that don't ask a question or aren't exclamations), the first letter shouldn't be capitalized, nor should there be end punctuation:
    - *What Brenda did (she found the car keys in that murky pool just by using her hands) was completely amazing.*
- For exclamations or questions inside parentheses, capitalize the first letter and use appropriate end punctuation:
    - *When Jake showed up for the holiday (Did he call to say he was coming?), we were completely surprised.*
- If a sentence stands alone in parentheses, the period for that sentence should go inside rather than outside of the parentheses:
    - *The hurricane wind gusts clocked in at nearly 90 miles an hour. (The sustained winds topped out near 75 miles an hour.) Thus, windows shattered and the fast-moving air stripped shingles and siding off of the buildings on our block.*

Think About It

- Where could a hyphen prevent confusion or misreading of your ideas?
- What prefixes, if any, have you used, and what hyphen guideline above might apply?
- Where should a hyphen be if you need to break apart a word in the middle of a line?
- Where can you set off information with parentheses to make your ideas clearer?
- What should you write inside parentheses, and how should you punctuate it?

With these questions in mind, check your writing for different places where you may need to use or delete hyphens or parentheses based on these guidelines.

Dashes, Slashes, Brackets, and Ellipses

Chapter 5: Section 3, Lesson 8

There's a good chance you've run across some of the more unusual forms of punctuation that crop up in writing from time to time. While dashes **—**, slashes **/**, brackets **[ ]**, and ellipsis points **. . .** don't always register as you skim a blog post or a magazine article, they could be useful in your own essays or other writing, especially in academic settings, where they may even be a necessity.

Dashes

There are several types of dashes, but the type writers most commonly use is called the em dash (or simply, the *dash*). The dash is an informal kind of punctuation that indicates a pause or interruption to let the writer emphasize or clarify something. Dashes can also show interrupted speech, especially in transcripts or other written dialogue. In addition, a 3-em dash (three em dashes strung together) is used for certain bibliographic entries in different style manuals like APA or Chicago/Turabian style. To see examples of working with 3-em dashes, refer to [Chicago/Turabian style](). You can easily form a dash by typing two hyphens (—) and hitting "enter" on a PC. For Macs, hold down the "option" key and hit the hyphen/underscore key. Try it! Note that a dash and a single hyphen are different forms of punctuation and cannot be used interchangeably.

Because dashes are informal, you won't often use them in academic papers like formal research essays. If you use too many dashes, your sentences seem disjointed or broken up, and the dashes will distract your audience; it's best to use them sparingly. Even in less formal writing, like personal essays, one dash per page may be too much.

Notice how the dash adds emphasis at the beginning or the ending of these sentences:

- *A mansion, a yacht, a villa in Spain—these are all things that this week's lottery winner said she would purchase in the near future.*
- *The things he wanted most in life were simple—a red convertible, a two-bedroom house, and a llama.*

You might also use a dash if you want to add an example or further explanation of a topic in the middle of a sentence that isn't necessary for understanding the sentence's overall meaning:

- *Different ethnic foods—Thai, Indian, Iranian, Ethiopian—have become a common part of the American diet.*

Here's a dash in dialogue being used to show interruption:

- *Sally started to explain the principle, "When a wing travels through the air it creates—"*
  Just then, Bob dropped his wine glass on the tile floor, shattering it and spilling his merlot.

Slashes

Slashes have many functions. In the American Psychological Association (APA) style guide, slashes can be used to cite a republished work in text, to clarify a phrase, and to set off English phonemes, among other uses, all of which are listed in section 4.11 of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). In Modern Language Association (MLA) and Chicago/Turabian style especially, slashes are most commonly used as indicators between lines of

quoted poetry, as seen in these lines by T. S. Eliot:

- *"Let us go then, you and I, / When the evening is spread out against the sky / Like a patient etherized upon a table."*

Slashes can indicate acceptable alternative wording as in *pass/fail*, *he/she*, and *and/or*:

- *Passports can be used for entry into foreign countries and/or as proof of identification.*

Slashes often work as an abbreviation for the word *per*:

- *Rent for a one-bedroom apartment in the new buildings was $1050/week.*

Brackets
Brackets are used to insert your own words into the words of another writer. In MLA, APA, and Chicago/Turabian, writers can use brackets to show changes or additions inside a quoted passage.

- **Original Quote**: "They were required by the school to wear helmets during practice" (Smith 47).
- **Clarified:** "[Gymnasts] were required by the school to wear helmets during practice" (Smith 47).

In MLA, APA, and Chicago/Turabian style, brackets can also be used to insert words into the text to show an error in the writing being quoted. The Latin word *sic*, which means *thus*, is used to explain that the text being quoted contains typographical errors. The word isn't italicized when used in MLA and APA, but it is italicized in Chicago/Turabian:

- "Its [sic] difficult to tell if the team will measure up to fans' expectations this year" (Halcro 6).
- Collins points out a now nearly disappeared feature of early city planning, at the corner of Bishop Street and Barrington Street, noting "the cannon mounted in the ground near the edge of the steps to ward of the wheels of wagons [*sic*]" (1975, 97).

Ellipses
Ellipses can confuse readers if used to indicate a pause. In actuality, a dash should indicate a pause, and ellipses should point out where unnecessary words have been removed from a quotation. Because MLA, APA, and Chicago/Turabian style use ellipses differently, it's necessary to take look at them in more detail in each style.

MLA
If the words you're removing are at the beginning or in the middle of a sentence, use three periods with spaces between them. If the words you quote make up a complete sentence but are only a part of an original sentence from which you're quoting, use ellipses to replace the missing words. Finally, if the words you've eliminated come at the end of a sentence with an in-text citation, include ellipses at the end of the sentence. Add the closing punctuation after the quotation marks and after the in-text citation.

- **Original Quote:** "Apart from his athletic prowess, Grady had been gifted with all the trappings of what I imagined to be a charmed life: a fastidious,

aproned mother who radiated calm, maternal concern; a ruddy stoic father with a knack for home repairs" (Cooper 3).

- **An Opening Ellipsis:** ". . . Grady had been gifted with all the trappings of what I imagined to be a charmed life: a fastidious, aproned mother who radiated calm, maternal concern; a ruddy stoic father with a knack for home repairs" (Cooper 3).

- **An Interrupting Ellipsis:** "Apart from his athletic prowess, Grady had been gifted with . . . a charmed life: a fastidious, aproned mother who radiated calm, maternal concern; a ruddy stoic father with a knack for home repairs" (Cooper 3).

- **An Ending Ellipsis:** "Apart from his athletic prowess, Grady had been gifted with all the trappings of what I imagined to be a charmed life . . ." (Cooper 3).

If the words you're removing are between two complete sentences, keep the punctuation at the end of the first sentence and include ellipses after it. Some writers prefer to capitalize the letter after the final ellipsis point if what follows is a complete sentence:

- **Original Quote:** "Apart from the storm, things went well. We woke up early and we were able to travel a great distance" (Zook 44).

- **An Ellipsis to Combine Two or More Sentences:** "Apart from the storm, things went well. . . . we were able to travel a great distance" (Zook 44).

- **Combining Two or More Sentences With a Capital Letter:** "Apart from the storm, things went well. . . . We were able to travel a great distance" (Zook 44).

If the punctuation between the two sentences is something other than a period (like a semicolon or an exclamation point), keep it in place if it helps readers understand the meaning of the sentence. If the punctuation came before the text that the ellipsis is replacing, then it needs to appear before the ellipsis in the quote, and likewise if it appears after. Note the following examples:

- **Original Quote:** According to Johnson Broderick, "The rickety bridge they crossed could barely hold the weight of the lorries because of its weak superstructure; although it did shimmy, it did not collapse" (223).

- **Before Punctuation:** According to Johnson Broderick, "The rickety bridge they crossed could barely hold the weight of the lorries . . . ; although it did shimmy, it did not collapse" (223).

- **After Punctuation:** According to Johnson Broderick, "The rickety bridge they crossed could barely hold the weight of the lorries because of its weak superstructure; . . . it did not collapse" (223).

Above, if no punctuation remained before or after the ellipses, readers would see two complete sentences without anything showing them that these ideas were separate. It would in essence be a long run-on sentence.

APA

In contrast, APA suggests avoiding ellipses at the beginning or end of a quotation, unless it's necessary to prevent misinterpretation. Instead, use three spaced ellipsis points only if you need to omit wording within a sentence:

- "To me this picture enshrines the atmosphere of . . . the last golden colonial days of a British colonial society" (Collins, 1975, p. 79).

Use four spaced ellipsis points if you need to omit wording between two sentences:

- "To me this picture enshrines the atmosphere of . . . . an effete society, many of whose members were soon to be supplanted by the developing role of the 'potato scholars' of Pictou County" (Collins, 1975, p. 79).

Chicago/Turabian
Chicago/Turabian also discourages using ellipses at the beginning or end of a quotation, unless you want to mark a sentence as deliberately incomplete. Use three spaced ellipsis points if you need to omit wording within a sentence:

- "To me this picture enshrines the atmosphere of . . . the last golden days of a British colonial society" (Collins 1975, 79).

Use four spaced ellipsis points if you need to omit wording between two sentences:

- "To me this picture enshrines the atmosphere of . . . . an effete society, many of whose members were soon to be supplanted by the developing role of the 'potato scholars' of Pictou County" (Collins 1975, 79).

Think About It

- Where is it useful to set off parenthetical information with dashes?
- If you're quoting a poem, where do you need to include slashes to show line breaks?
- Where could you use a word in brackets to make a quote easier to understand?
- What ideas in your quotations aren't necessary to show your point?
- Which words can you replace with an ellipsis to tighten your prose?

Try using these questions to help you decide if these different types of punctuation are appropriate in your writing.

Capitalization

Chapter 5: Section 3, Lesson 9

To capitalize or not to capitalize . . . that is the question.

When you capitalize and what you capitalize depends on grammar conventions and your own stylistic choices. In less formal writing, like poems, text messages, personal letters, or ads, you might choose to flout known conventions by ignoring capitalization standards or by capitalizing certain letters to draw attention to a particular WORD or phrase. In formal writing, including academic assignments or work-related correspondence, you should follow capitalization conventions to help establish your credibility and membership within a community of writers—classmates, instructors, colleagues and employers.

Capitalization Conventions for Formal Writing Situations

You probably know to capitalize in the most common scenarios:

- The first word in a sentence: **The** *first letter of this sentence is capitalized*.
- The letter *I* when it's used as a pronoun: *The driver of the car thought **I** was turning left*.
- Proper nouns: *My best friend, **John Smith**, is going to see a movie at **Radio City Music Hall** in **New York City**.*

This last convention might be the most difficult to meet. That's because some nouns are considered proper in certain scenarios but not in others. Note the difference in the use of a capital or lowercase letter for the word *senator* and *mom* in the following examples:

- **Senator Smith** *was elected to office in November.*
- *The **senator** from Kansas will join the debate.*
- *I was embarrassed when **Mom** drug out my baby pictures to show my prom date.*
- *I know that **moms** are supposed to do things like that, but it's still so embarrassing.*

Typically, if a noun names a specific, unique, or well-known person, place, or thing, then it's labeled a proper noun and should be capitalized.

If you find yourself questioning whether or not to capitalize, the conventions below can help. Grammar handbooks and dictionaries are also helpful reference sources, so be sure to keep those close by.

Common Capitalization Conventions for Proper Nouns

Proper nouns are typically organized into three categories: people, places, and things. Decide which category fits the noun in question, and then refer to the examples below for guidance.

People

Capitalize personal/professional titles when used before a name.

- **Aunt Jenny** *can pick you up from work today.*
- **Secretary Harrison** *will address the public during his press conference today.*
- **Mr. Potter** *works in the library.*
- **Dr. Finch** *has an appointment available on Monday.*

As always, there are a few exceptions:

- Do not capitalize the title if it's followed by a comma: *The **chairman of the board**, John Carter, will introduce the speaker.*
- Do not capitalize a professional title if it's used after or instead of a name: ***The president** will arrive on Wednesday.*
- Do not capitalize a personal title on its own unless it's used in place of a name:
    - *I love **my dad**.*
    - *I love **you, Dad**.*

Also capitalize the names of God, specific deities, and religious figures:

- *We thank **God** the **Father** for his many blessings.*
- *My yoga instructor bows to **Buddha** every morning.*
- *The sermon delivered by **Pope John Paul** was both funny and moving.*

However, don't capitalize the word *god* when used nonspecifically: *One **god** in Greek mythology that I admire is **Zeus**.*

Places
The names of planets, continents, and countries are considered proper nouns:

- *Someday, astronauts will figure out how to land on **Mars**.*
- *During the summer, I will travel through **Europe** by train.*
- *My neighbor is from **Japan**.*

Names of other heavenly bodies are not: *The **moon** is full tonight.*

In addition, capitalize the names of geographical regions and territories:

- *Jessica goes to college in the **Northeast**.*
- *Homeowners in **Anne Arundel County** pay huge taxes for the top-rated schools.*

But not points of the compass: *Head **east** when you get to the river.*

Capitalize the names of streets, roads, man-made/natural structures, and landmarks:

- *We live in the first cul-de-sac off of **Mulberry Road**.*
- *The **Great Wall of China** extends for miles.*
- *The **Grand Canyon** is more than just a big hole in the ground!*

Things
Capitalize specific languages, nationalities, and races:

- *I wish I knew how to speak **Spanish** with more confidence.*
- *The first-grade teacher is **Lebanese**.*
- *My cousin is 30, **Caucasian**, single, and college-educated.*

The days of the week, the months of the year, and holidays should also be capitalized:

- *I work on **Mondays** and **Wednesdays**.*
- *His birthday falls in **January**.*
- *My favorite holiday is **Halloween**.*

An exception to this rule—don't capitalize seasons unless used in a title:

- *The best time to view the cherry blossoms is in the **spring**.*
- *I signed up for the **Fall** 2016 term.*

Capitalize brand names, institutions, companies, and organizations:

- *The **Gucci** purse sold for $400 at the consignment store.*
- *My son goes to business school at **Harvard University**.*
- ***Gap** and **Old Navy** will open in **May** at the local mall.*
- *The **Food and Drug Administration** has added warning labels to energy drinks.*

Also capitalize well-known time periods and events:

- *Shakespeare was born during the **Elizabethan** era.*
- *My uncle served as a pilot in **World War** II.*

Finally, don't capitalize century numbers: *Many great novels were published during the **twentieth** century.*

Capitalize titles, quotations, and other reference information according to a preferred citation style. See MLA Style, APA Style, and Chicago/Turabian Style for more specific information.

Think About It

- Where do you need to capitalize references to a particular or unique person, place, or thing?
- What letters of titles should be capitalized?
- If the writing is informal, where and why could you intentionally break capitalization rules?

Capitalization is important because it helps readers differentiate proper nouns from other words in your text. Following common capitalization conventions helps enhance your credibility as a writer.

Spelling Strategies

Chapter 5: Section 3, Lesson 10

Getting spelling right the first time around is a challenge for many writers, especially because (as all writers know) English breaks rules that are supposed to be consistent! Correct spelling puts the polish on your writing. Here are some basic ideas about what to look for and how to address spelling issues.

Strategies and Tools for Polishing Your Writing
Spellcheck
The first step you can take is to use the spellchecker on your word-processing software. This will help with the basics, but it won't catch everything, including capitalization errors. In spite of a spellchecker's limitations, it can "learn" to recognize commonly used foreign words and unusual names. It can also search for *homophones*, or words that are pronounced the same, have different meanings, and may or may not be spelled the same (see below for more about homophones).

Dictionary
You can often start your reviews by using your spellcheck, but how do you know which word to choose? To choose the correct word, you'll want to check a dictionary to determine which of the suggested words offer your intended meaning.

Mnemonics
Mnemonics are memory devices that help you remember something. For example, if you need to remember whether Elsie or Evelyn is older, you could use the fact that *L* comes before *V* in the alphabet to remember that Elsie is older. Check out these spelling-related examples as well:

- *Stationery* (the kind you write letters on) uses an *envelope* whereas *stationary* means not moving. The *e* in *envelope* may help you remember the correct spelling.
- The *principal* of the school is your *pal* (as opposed to a *principle*).
- *Affect* is an *action,* which is easy to remember because they both start with *a*. If you aren't describing an *action*, use effect.

Sounding It Out
Sounding out the spelling of words can be another tool, especially for words like *medicate (med-i-cate)* where sounds tend to blend. However, you'll need to use this tool with care since not all words can be sounded out. For example, the word *gracious* is pronounced as if it should be spelled *gray-shus,* but you know that isn't right. When in doubt, always confirm your spelling with a dictionary.

Homophones
Homophones are also tricky. These are words that sound alike but are spelled differently. Consider this sentence, for instance: ***They're*** *certain* **their** *cars were parked over* **there**. This sentence includes three different words—homophones—which sound the same. You can check out a longer list at [Common Homophones and Homonyms](#), but here are some you'll often use:

their (possessive form of *they*)	there (in that place)	they're (contraction of *they are*)
to (in the direction of)	too (in addition, excessive)	two (number between *one* and *three*)

whose (possessive form of *who*)	who's (contraction for *who is* or *who has*)
whether (introducing a choice)	weather (climatic conditions)
effect (a result; to cause to happen)	affect (an emotion; to have an influence)
accept (take or receive)	except (leave out)
you're (contraction of *you are*)	your (possessive form of *you*)
its (possessive form of *it*)	it's (contraction of *it is* or *it has*)

Spelling Rules

Everyone has broken a rule or preferred not to follow a rule at some point, but several common spelling rules are actually quite helpful:

"I" before "E"

As a general rule, use *i* before *e* except after *c* or when pronounced "ay" (as in *eight*). You may find exceptions to this rule, but it should provide you with a good starting point.

• *i* before *e*	achieve, brief, field, friend
• except after *c*	ceiling, receipt, perceive
• or when pronounced "ay"	eight, neighbor, reign, weigh
• exceptions	either, foreign, height, leisure, neither, seize

Prefixes

A prefix does not change the spelling of the word it's attached to. For example, *misspelling* is often misspelled as *mispelled*, but all of the letters in both *mis + spelling* are needed.

Suffixes

A suffix may change the spelling of the word it's added to.

- Silent *e:* Drop the final silent *e* on a word when you add a suffix that starts with a vowel: *smile/smiling*. The initial *i* in *–ing* makes it necessary to drop the final *e* in *smile*. Keep the final *e* if the suffix starts with a consonant: *disgrace/disgraceful*.
- Final *y:* When you add a suffix to a word that ends in *y,* change the *y* to *i* if it is preceded by a consonant: *try/tried, busy/busily, fly/flies*. Because *r* is a consonant, the *y* in *try* changes to *i* in *tried*, and so on.
- The *-ible/-able* rule: If the root is not a complete word, use *-ible*: *audible, edible, incredible*. The root *aud* is not a full word, so *-ible* is used. If the root word is complete, use *-able*: *comfortable, defendable, searchable*. The root *comfort* is a full word, so *-able* is used.
- Final consonants: When adding a suffix to a word that ends in a vowel and a consonant, double the final consonant if the word contains only one syllable or ends in an accented syllable: *stop/stopping, begin/beginner, occur/occurrence*. *Stop* ends with the vowel + consonant combination, *op*, and is one syllable, so when adding the *–ing* suffix, the consonant *p* is

doubled to make *stopping*. The same rule applies to *beginner* and *occurrence*.

Plurals

Most words form plurals with an *s*. For words ending in *s, ch, sh, x, or z*, add -*es*: *bus/buses, church/churches, dish/dishes, box/boxes, quiz/quizzes.*

- Also, add -*s* to words ending in *o* if the *o* is preceded by a vowel: *patio/patios, zoo/zoos*.
- Add -*es* if the *o* is preceded by a consonant: *hero/heroes, veto/vetoes*.
- Exceptions to this rule include *memo/memos, piano/pianos, solo/solos*.

Commonly Misspelled Words

Sometimes, knowing which words you often have trouble with can you help avoid misspelling them. The columns below list some of the most commonly misspelled words:

accept/ed	believe/d/s	exercise/s/ing	occasion/s	successful/ly
affect/s	business/es	experience	occurred	therefore
against	cannot	final/ly	occurrences	through
a lot	categories	heroes	professor	truly
all right	definitely	immediate/ly	received/d/s	until
apparently	dependent	lose	roommate/s	where
argument/s	develop/s	may be	sense	whether
before	environment	necessary	separate	without
beginning	every day	noticeable	success	woman

After reading all of these strategies, you might find it helpful to begin an error list so you know what to look for as you revise. See Keeping a Writer's Log for some ideas. This particular list will be specific to spelling errors/words that give you the most trouble, perhaps including words from the list above. For example, remembering how to correctly spell *their/they're/there, receive*, and *heroes* may be difficult. If you put these words on your list, you can focus on the strategies that work best for you to combat those particular errors, and you can check for them carefully as you proofread. As time passes, the words you list will probably change; the point is that an error list will be yours—specific to the words you need to address.

Think About it

- What are the most common spelling errors that challenge you?
- What strategies will help you catch those errors?
- What rules should you keep in mind to help you add prefixes and suffixes?

Using spellcheck software to determine spelling errors is just a start. Remember you can also use a dictionary, create mnemonics, sound out the word, check for homophones, review spelling rules(including those for commonly misspelled words), and create an error list. Choose the tools that work best for your writing process so you can polish your spelling!

Independent Clauses

You may be wondering what independent clauses are and why you need to know about them. Independent clauses are so foundational to good writing that you already use them every day, both in speech and in writing. Learning more about what they are will help you use them even more effectively in your writing.

Defining a Clause
Let's start by figuring out what a clause is.

A clause is a group of words. It includes two parts:

- **A noun (subject)** tells the reader what the sentence is about. It's a person, place, thing, or idea. To see more, check out Nouns and Subjects.
- **A verb (predicate)** tells the reader the action in the sentence or what the subject is doing. Refer to Predicates for more details.

Here are a couple of examples of clauses:
My cat is lazy.
I love to travel.

Types of Clauses
There are two types of clauses:

- **Independent Clauses (main clauses):** These clauses have a noun (subject) and verb (predicate). They can stand alone as a complete sentence.
- **Dependent Clauses:** These have a have a noun (subject) and verb (predicate). However, they can't stand alone as a complete sentence, so they have to be attached to an independent clause. Learn more about them in Dependent Clauses.

Independent Clauses
As mentioned above, independent clauses have three characteristics. They must have a noun and a verb (or a subject and a predicate). They must also stand alone as a complete sentence. If you've heard the term *complete thought*, don't use it; instead, think of a clause as its grammatical parts—noun (subject), verb (predicate), and punctuation. If the necessary grammatical parts are present, the sentence will be complete.

Coordinating Conjunctions
Coordinating conjunctions are also important to understanding independent clauses. They join words or groups of words that are similar. In this case, they join two independent clauses. They can also begin an independent clause. To hear more about them, see Conjunctions.

Coordinating conjunctions are easy to remember if you think of the word *FANBOYS*: *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so.*

You may have been told never to begin a sentence with *and, but, yet,* or *or.* Teachers sometimes make such a rule for beginning writers so they won't produce writing like *I love ice cream. And always will.* In this case, the second sentence in this pair is actually a fragment because it has no subject. But most of the best writers in the English language use coordinating conjunctions, especially *but* and *and*, to begin sentences and even paragraphs. These sentences

are grammatically correct.

Transition Words

Transition words are important because they can help show connections and relationships between ideas in two clauses. Transitions are often used to connect two independent clauses. A clause beginning with a transition word can still be an independent clause:

- ***However***, *things changed.*
- ***Therefore***, *he decided to get a new job.*
- ***For example***, *they should sell the old one.*

Additional transition words include *for instance, in fact, moreover, nevertheless, furthermore, then, soon, later, meanwhile, now, finally, sometimes, indeed, also, as a result, after all, instead, still,* and *in general.*

Using these words will show how things are related and connected.

Punctuation

Finally, for a sentence to be complete, it must have one of three marks of end punctuation—a period (.), a question mark (?), or an exclamation point (!). For information on how to punctuate independent clauses, check out End Punctuation.

Think About It

- Which grammatical parts, if any, are missing from sentences intended as independent clauses?
- What transition words would you like to add to connect independent clauses in your writing?
- Which coordinating conjunctions would you want to use to strengthen your writing?

Learning about independent clauses will take your writing to the next level and help to prevent sentence errors.

Dependent Clauses

Dependent clauses play a significant role in writing sentences. They help show how ideas are connected and emphasize parts of a sentence. Identifying a dependent clause and connecting it to another clause will allow you to give your writing variety and make it more complex. Knowing how and when to use a dependent clause will help you avoid fragments and connect ideas more efficiently.

Defining a Clause
Knowing what a clause is will make it easier to discuss and understand dependent clauses. A clause is a group of words that has a noun (subject) and a verb (also called a predicate). Every simple sentence is a clause. Take a look at these two examples:
My cat is lazy.
I love to travel.

To read more on the clause-sentence relationship, see [Complete Sentences](#).

Types of Clauses
There are two types of clauses:

- **Independent Clauses:** Independent clauses have a noun (subject), verb (predicate), and can stand alone as complete sentences. More on these are found at [Subjects](#), [Predicates](#), and [Independent Clauses](#).
- **Dependent Clauses:** Dependent clauses also have a noun (subject) and verb (predicate), but they cannot stand alone as complete sentences. These clauses often (but do not always) include a connecting word that links them to an independent clause. Dependent clauses can also act like a part of speech, taking the place of a noun, adjective, or adverb.

Types of Dependent Clauses
There are three types of dependent clauses:

- Noun Clauses
- Adjective Clauses
- Adverb Clauses

Noun Clauses
When dependent clauses act as nouns, they are subjects or objects of their sentence. These dependent clauses start with relative pronouns like *that, which, what, who, whom, whatever, why, how, whose, whoever,* or *whether*:

Whoever broke my phone *is going to be sorry.*

In this sentence, the words *Whoever broke my phone* are acting as a noun and the subject of the sentence. Noun clauses can be difficult to identify, so you can't just look at the first word of the clause. Instead, try looking at how the clause fits in the whole sentence to see if it is working as a subject or object.

Adjective Clauses (Relative Clauses)
Dependent clauses acting as adjectives describe or modify a noun or a pronoun. They give supplemental information, describing or defining the noun further. They answer questions like *What kind? Which one? How many? Whose?* They can give necessary information, but they can also give extra or nonessential information.

Adjective clauses are usually next to the word or idea they describe.

Adjective clauses (in bold) are introduced by relative pronouns. These pronouns include words like *who, whom, whose, which, what, whatever, whoever, whomever,* and *that*:

*The couple in **whose house the suspect was arrested** is being questioned by the authorities.*

Here, the clause *in whose house the suspect was arrested* describes the noun *couple.* Often, prepositions are used before the relative pronouns that introduce the adjective clause. You can look for words like *to* or *for* before the pronouns *whom, which*, and *whose*. In the clause above, *in* is the preposition before the pronoun *whose.*

Punctuating Adjective Clauses
To punctuate adjective clauses, decide whether the information in the clause is necessary to the sentence. If it's necessary, it's an essential (restrictive) clause. If not, it's a nonessential (nonrestrictive) clause.

- An essential clause is necessary within the sentence, giving needed information about the noun it refers to. There are no commas or punctuation around it:

*She wore the wedding dress **that her mother had worn twenty-five years earlier.***

The clause *that her mother had worn twenty-five years earlier* is essential to help readers understand which of many wedding dresses the bride was wearing. Therefore, it doesn't need commas.

- Nonessential clauses are different. They give information that may be interesting and useful, but they're not necessary for the sentence to make sense. Readers will understand the sentence with or without the nonessential clause, so set these clauses off from the main part of the sentence with commas:

*The story of the Flood, **which is found in many cultures**, may be based on a real flood that occurred long, long ago.*

The clause *which is found in many cultures* isn't essential to the sentence's meaning; there's only one flood significant enough to be referred to as the Flood. As a result, you'll place commas on both sides of the clause to set it apart from the main flow of the sentence.

Adverb Clauses
Dependent clauses can also act as adverbs. When they do, they describe or modify a verb, adjective, or adverb. They also show relationships and answer questions like *Why? How? When? Where?* They can tell readers the time and place when something happens, the cause of something, the result, the purpose, contrasts, comparisons, or other connections between ideas. Consider this example:

***Wherever Micah goes**, he always takes his teddy bear with him.*

Adverb clauses are introduced by subordinating conjunctions and are usually at the beginning or end of a sentence. *Wherever Micah goes* tells readers when he takes

his teddy bear along with him.

Punctuating Adverb Clauses
To punctuate adverb clauses, think about where the clause is in the sentence.

- If the adverb clause (in bold) begins the sentence, use a comma between the adverb clause and the main clause: ***Although Samantha dropped her phone from the balcony***, *it didn't break.*
- Don't use a comma if the adverb clause (in bold) comes at the end of the sentence: *The project will be late **unless you get off your cell phone**.*

Think About It

- When might you use the three different types of dependent clauses to add variety to your writing?
- Which nonrestrictive clauses need commas around them to position them correctly in their sentences?
- What adverb clauses need revision when a comma is placed before a clause that ends a sentence?

Dependent clauses can help add variety to your sentences and make connections between your ideas clearer. Using them appropriately will enhance your writing.

Complete Sentences

Chapter 5: Section 4, Lesson 3

You probably have a general idea of what a complete sentence is. It's one of those concepts you may have heard about for as long as you remember, but figuring out exactly what a sentence really is can be confusing. It's important, though, since an incomplete sentence is often considered a major writing error. Knowing the components of a sentence will make writing easier.

Defining a Sentence
Let's start with what a sentence is: a group of words that expresses a writer's thought or idea. A sentence can also be called an independent clause. To see more on this topic, refer to Independent Clauses.

A complete sentence includes:

- **A noun (subject):** This word or words tell the reader what the sentence is about. A noun is a person, place, thing, or idea. A sentence can have a compound subject with several simple subjects joined together with conjunctions. For more information, see Nouns and Subjects.
- **A verb (predicate):** This word or words explain the action in the sentence or what the subject is doing. A sentence can also have a compound verb, which means a subject has more than one verb and is completing more than one action. For more information on verbs in the predicate, refer to Predicates and Subject-Verb Agreement.
- **An object:** This word or words follow and receive the action of the verb. An object isn't always necessary for the sentence to be complete.
- **An appropriate mark of punctuation:** The type of punctuation used depends on the sentence. You'll choose one of these punctuation marks: a period (.), a question mark (?), or an exclamation point (!). For more information on punctuation, refer to End Punctuation.

Consider these examples of complete sentences:

- ***They throw.*** In this sentence, the subject is *they,* the verb is *throw*, and the mark of punctuation is a period. Although this sentence is short, it's complete.
- ***Every month, Bob and Jan throw a party.*** For this sentence, the subject is *Bob and Jan,* the verb is *throw,* and the mark of punctuation is a period. The object is *a party*.

Sentences as Complete Thoughts
You may have been taught that a sentence expresses a complete thought, but this description isn't helpful and can be confusing. Try thinking of a sentence in terms of its components rather than whether the thought is complete. Here's why.

First, one person's idea of a complete thought can be different from another person's. What one person thinks is *complete* may not match a grammatically complete sentence.

Second, with rare exceptions, the meaning of a sentence is connected to the other sentences around it. In good writing, *most* sentences don't actually express complete ideas: good writing flows from sentence to sentence with most sentences referring to ideas from earlier in the piece of writing, preparing the way for things you'll say later.

As a result, it's best to think of a sentence in terms of its grammatical parts—noun

(subject), verb (predicate), and punctuation—rather than whether its thought is complete. If the necessary grammatical parts are present, the sentence will be complete.

Common Word Order in a Sentence
Scholars who study languages say that English sentences are constructed with a standard word order, which they call *SVO*. In other words, a sentence's components will usually be in the following order: the subject (S), the predicate (V), the object (O), and the mark of punctuation.

Consider this example: *The roses bloom in red and pink hues*. In this sentence, the subject is *The roses,* the predicate is *bloom*, the object is *in red and pink hues*, and the mark of punctuation is a period.

Sometimes, professional writers—especially creative writers and poets—change the order of the words in a sentence to create a particular effect, like this: *In red and pink hues, the roses bloom.*

Although this sentence contains the same grammatical parts as the one above, its word order has been changed to emphasize the colors of the flowers. In most pieces of academic writing, however, readers expect sentences to follow the standard SVO word order, which you should use unless your instructor says otherwise.

Basic Patterns for Sentences
Sentences written in English often follow five basic patterns:

- Independent clause*: **I enjoy taking a walk.***
- Dependent phrase/clause, + independent clause: *In the morning,* **I enjoy taking a walk.**
- Independent clause + dependent phrase/clause: **I enjoy taking a walk** *in the morning.*
- Independent clause + , + coordinating conjunction + independent clause: **I enjoy taking a walk**, *but* **I love going for a run.** (You can use the coordinating conjunctions *for, and, nor, but, or, yet,* and *so—FANBOYS*.)
- Independent clause + ; + independent clause: **I enjoy taking a walk**; **I love going for a run.**

When using these patterns, remember that a dependent phrase/clause can't stand alone as a complete sentence. For more information on dependent clauses, refer to [Dependent Clauses](#). Use the pattern that fits best with the ideas you want to express.

Think About It

- What details about complete sentences could you use to check your draft?
- How could thinking of a sentence in terms of its parts help edit your draft?
- Which sentence parts need adjusting to follow standard SVO word order?

Complete sentences are an essential part of good writing. Mastering them will strengthen your writing, and your readers will appreciate the results.

Sentence Types

You've probably heard a lot about personality types, but sentences are classified by type as well. While sentences aren't introverted or extroverted (but wouldn't that be interesting?), they're classified by structure and function—or by how they're put together and what their goals are. Understanding sentence types allows you to create more complex sentences and share your ideas in new ways.

Classifying Sentences by Structure
Just as a beautiful bridge spanning a river is created from smaller, purposeful parts, a sentence is classified by the parts used to write it. English sentences are separated into one of four structures: *simple*, *compound*, *complex*, and *compound-complex*.

Simple Sentences
A simple sentence consists of a single *independent clause*, which you can read about in [Independent Clauses](). Here are a few very basic independent clauses:

- *Lisa drove.*
- *Lisa drove her car from Minneapolis to Milwaukee.*
- *Lisa drove her 13-year-old, rusty Mustang from Minneapolis to Milwaukee on a steamy July day.*

Regardless of length, each one consists of a single independent clause, making them simple sentences.

Compound Sentences
A compound sentence consists of two or more *independent clauses* connected either by a semicolon or with a comma and coordinating conjunction such as *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so.*

- *Toby wanted to become a doctor; he applied to medical school.*
- *Toby wanted to become a doctor, so he applied to medical school.*

Both of these sentences contain two independent clauses—*Toby wanted to become a doctor* and *he applied to medical school*. In the first sentence, these two clauses are connected with a semicolon, which shows that a relationship exists between the two but doesn't specify the nature of that relationship. In the second sentence, the clauses are connected with a comma and the coordinating conjunction *so*, which shows that a cause/effect relationship exists between the two parts.

Complex Sentences
A complex sentence consists of one *independent clause* connected to one or more *dependent clauses*. Find more information in [Dependent Clauses](), but here are some dependent clauses to consider:

- *Because I couldn't fall asleep last night*
- *After I fell asleep last night*

By themselves, they're fragments, leaving you wondering what the writer wanted to say next. Connected with independent clauses, they become complete sentences:

- ***Because I couldn't fall asleep last night,*** *I'm very tired today.*

- *I dreamed of unicorns and popsicles **after I fell asleep last night**.*

These are *complex sentences* because they each contain a dependent clause and an independent clause.

You probably noticed that when the dependent clause comes *before* the independent clause, a comma follows the dependent clause. When the dependent clause comes *after* the independent clause, no comma is needed.

Compound-Complex Sentences
All that remains now is to combine the last two types. A compound-complex sentence consists of two (or more) *independent clause(s)* and one (or more) *dependent clause(s)*:

Because I couldn't fall asleep last night, I'm very tired today, and I can't stop thinking about unicorns.

This compound-complex sentence can be broken down into its parts:

- ***Because I couldn't fall asleep last night,*** (dependent clause beginning with the subordinate word *because*)
- ***I'm very tired today*** (independent clause)
- ***, and*** (coordinating conjunction to connect two independent clauses)
- ***I can't stop thinking about unicorns.*** (independent clause)

The parts can easily be moved around as well:
I'm very tired today because I couldn't fall asleep last night, and I can't stop thinking about unicorns.

Now compare this compound-complex sentence with a string of simple sentences:
I'm very tired today. I couldn't fall asleep last night. I can't stop thinking about unicorns.

The compound-complex sentence sounds smooth while three simple sentences in a row sound choppy.

Classifying Sentences by Function
You've seen how to classify sentences by their parts; you can also classify them by their function—what they're trying to accomplish. English sentences are categorized into four basic functions: *declarative, interrogative, exclamatory*, and *imperative*.

Declarative
A *declarative* sentence makes a statement. Most sentences are declarative:

- *Unicorns are not actually real.*
- *Because I couldn't sleep last night, I'm going to bed early tonight.*

Interrogative
An *interrogative* sentence is used to indicate a question. You've heard of police interrogating a suspect. The term *interrogative* comes from the same root word. This type of sentence requires a question mark:

- *Are you sure about that?*
- *How much coffee have you had?*

Exclamatory

Next, an *exclamatory* sentence is used for an expression filled with strong emotion. Like an interrogative sentence, an exclamatory sentence can be recognized by its end punctuation: the exclamation point.

- *I can't believe what I just saw!*
- *They are real!*

Just beware of overusing exclamatory sentences. Exclamation points lose their effect if they appear too often.

Imperative

Finally, an *imperative* sentence makes a request or a command. The end punctuation will be a period, just as in declarative sentences:

- *Look at this video I took yesterday.*
- *Stop drinking so much coffee.*

So what's the difference? In most imperative sentences, the implied subject is *you,* even though the word *you* isn't in the sentence! For example, *Look at this video I took yesterday* is really the same as (*You) look at this video I took yesterday*.

This is called the *understood you* because even though the word isn't in the sentence, it's understood. If someone gives you a command, you know it's directed at you!

In formal writing, writers mostly choose declarative sentences, along with occasional interrogative sentences. In narratives or less formal writing, writers can use more imperative and exclamatory sentences.

Think About It

- Where have you used several simple sentences that might be combined into a compound or complex sentence to avoid choppiness?
- Look for patterns of sentence structures in your essay—how can you add variety to your structures?
- What types of sentences do you write most? What might be overused?

Sentences are classified according to their structure and their function. In terms of structure, a sentence can be simple, compound, complex, or compound-complex. In terms of function, a sentence can be declarative, interrogative, exclamatory, or imperative. Knowing the differences allows you to write with greater complexity and creativity, fitting your words and message to the needs of your audience.

Incomplete Sentences: Fragments

Chapter 5: Section 4, Lesson 5

I'm sick of trying to fix this! Never again! While the frustration the writer feels is clear in both of these statements, the second is technically an incomplete sentence. Sometimes, an incomplete sentence, or fragment, can provide emphasis or effect, as it does in this example. Most of the time, though, fragments aren't acceptable in academic writing. They may happen if you're really rushed while writing or if you're confused about where to place a period. Fragments generally fall into three categories:

- Missing subjects
- Missing predicates
- Unsupported dependent clauses

Fragments Due to Missing Subjects
A complete sentence needs to contain a **subject**, which is the noun, pronoun, or phrase that tells who or what the sentence is about. If a sentence is missing its subject, the main *who* or *what* the sentence is about will be unclear. Consider this example:

During high school worked as a grocery cashier to earn money for college.

Because there's no subject in this fragment, readers don't know who was working. However, in this example, there is a subject (in bold):

*During high school, **my father** worked as a grocery cashier to earn money for college.*

For more examples, see [Subjects](#).

Fragments Due to Missing Predicates
A complete sentence also needs to contain a **predicate,** which is the word or words in a sentence that express the action or state of being of the subject. A predicate includes at least one verb, although other words may be included as well. If a fragment lacks a verb, the main action or state of the subject will be unclear:

On Friday nights, he always to the drive-in movies with his friends.

In this fragment, the verb is missing. You'll notice that the next example makes a lot more sense because of the verb *went*:

*On Friday nights, he always **went** to the drive-in movies with his friends.*

This fragment needed an action verb. In addition to action verbs, a predicate can also have a verb of being:

*His friends **were** somewhat rowdy, but he **was** a good kid.*

You can see more examples in [Predicates](#). If you find that your writing contains fragments that are missing a subject or a predicate, a good way to avoid them is by looking at each sentence closely. After you write a draft, identify the subject and the verb in each sentence. If you can't find either of these pieces, add the

missing information.

Fragments Due to Unsupported Dependent Clauses
A complete sentence needs to contain at least one **independent clause**, which consists of a subject, a predicate, and appropriate end punctuation. You can use another type of clause, called a **dependent clause**, in combination with an independent clause. (See [Independent Clauses](#) and [Dependent Clauses](#) for more information on these types of clauses.) A dependent clause has a subject and a verb, but it can't stand alone. It depends on an independent clause to be complete. Alone, a dependent clause sounds like this:

- *Because the price of gas has increased*
- *When people ride the bus*

These are both dependent clauses, but they need independent clauses to be complete:

- *Because the price of gas has increased, more people are riding the bus.*
- *When people ride the bus, they can read or use a smartphone.*

One way to find and fix these types of fragments is by reading your sentences in reverse order. For example, if you start by reading the last sentence of your paper and then work your way backward, the fragments will be more obvious because you'll read any stand-alone dependent clauses by themselves, which will show that they're missing ideas and are incomplete. When you find a dependent clause by itself, try revising by either combining it with a nearby sentence or adding an independent clause to it.

In some cases, a fragment can be a phrase that's missing a subject or verb and could be combined with a nearby sentence. For instance, a writer can confuse a long phrase for a complete sentence if it has a lot of words:

After the long, stressful drive in rush-hour traffic.

This is a fragment because it's really a series of prepositional phrases instead of a sentence. You might revise it like this:

After the long, stressful drive in rush-hour traffic, we took a detour to find Lake Michigan.

Think About It

- What types of fragments are most common in your writing?
- Which fragments need independent clauses to be complete?
- Which fragments are long phrases in disguise?

Consider these questions to help avoid writing fragments in future essays. Taking the time to fix fragments and to reflect on why fragments occur will be well worth the effort in the long run.

Comma Splices and Run-ons

Chapter 5: Section 4, Lesson 6

Everyone knows about love—or at least thinks so! As you write words of passion to your sweetheart, you can get carried away in a flurry of thoughts, which often leads to comma splices or run-on sentences. These errors cause ideas to run together for the reader, and your meaning may become lost in the shuffle. Knowing how to spot and revise these mistakes may not improve your love life, but it should improve your communication!

Identifying Comma Splices and Run-on Sentences
To improve your communication, you can begin by identifying each of these errors:

- ***I love you, you love me*.** The part before the comma makes sense by itself, and the part after the comma makes sense by itself, but the punctuation is a mistake because there are two independent clauses joined by a comma, which just isn't strong enough to join two clauses. Using a comma in this way can make readers misunderstand the relationship between the two ideas. This mistake is a *comma splice*.
- ***I love you you love me.*** Two independent clauses run together without an attempt to join them properly is a *run-on or fused sentence*.

Eliminating Comma Splices and Run-On Sentences
Once you've identified a comma splice or run-on, you have several revision options. The method you choose depends on the meaning you want to convey.

Creating a Complete Stop
The period and semicolon both indicate the end of an independent clause and both effectively correct a comma splice or a run-on, but they convey slightly different meanings to readers.

A semicolon tells readers that the two independent clauses are closely related without indicating the specific nature of that relationship (such as one of addition, contrast, choice, cause/effect). To convey a close relationship and demonstrate a visual connection between the ideas, place a semicolon between the two independent clauses:

*I love you**;** you love me.*

A period goes a step further to tell readers that there's a complete separation, or a "full stop," between the two independent clauses. To convey a more distant relationship, place a period between the two independent clauses:

*I love you**.** You love me.*

Notice the sense of finality given by the periods. The periods work to separate thoughts—after *you,* it separates the two thoughts, and after *me*, it communicates that the discussion is finished.

Joining the Two Thoughts
You can correct a comma splice or run-on by creating a compound sentence. One way to accomplish this task is to join two independent clauses with a comma and a coordinating conjunction (remember *FANBOYS*). The coordinating conjunction shows readers the relationship between the two independent clauses.

*I love you**, and** you love me.*

Coordinating conjunctions can be used to demonstrate a number of relationships:

Conjunction	Relationship
for	cause/effect
and	addition
nor	negation
but	contrast
or	choice
yet	contrast
so	result

Another option you can try is joining two independent clauses with a semicolon, a conjunctive adverb, and a comma. Using a semicolon along with a conjunctive adverb and a comma also indicates that a relationship exlsts between the two independent clauses:

*I love you**; furthermore,** you love me.*

The comma following the conjunctive adverb shows that the word *furthermore* is introductory and serves to lead up to the main sentence. The second sentence itself supports and supplements the first. Use any of these possible common conjunctive adverbs to demonstrate their noted meanings:

To show addition	To show contrast	To show result	To show sequence
also	*anyway*	*accordingly*	*afterward*
again	*contrarily*	*consequently*	*meanwhile*
besides	*conversely*	*hence*	*next*
further	*however*	*subsequently*	*now*
furthermore	*instead*	*therefore*	*then*
moreover	*nevertheless*	*thus*	*thereafter*

To show comparison	To show a specific case	To return to a point	To recognize a sub-point
likewise	*namely*	*nevertheless*	*certainly*
similarly	*specifically*	*still*	*undoubtedly*

To show an example	To strengthen a point	To show choice
for example	*indeed*	*otherwise*
for instance		

You can also join the two thoughts by adding a subordinating conjunction at the beginning of one of the independent clauses. This changes the nature of that independent clause, making it dependent. When a clause is dependent, it must be connected to an existing independent clause.

*I will love you **until** I die.*

The independent clause is *I will love you*. The subordinating conjunction is *until*, and the dependent clause comes **after** the independent clause, so no additional

punctuation is needed.

When the dependent clause is placed **before** the independent clause, separate it from the independent clause with a comma:

Although *you don't even know me, I love you.*

The independent clause is *I love you*, the subordinate clause is *Although you don't even know me*, and a comma separates the two thoughts. Here's a list of common subordinating conjunctions you can use to create a similar relationship:

after	since
although	though
as	unless
as soon as	until
because	when
before	whenever
every time	whereas
if	while

Think About It

- Where do commas join two independent clauses in your writing, creating comma splices?
- Which sentences fuse or merge, creating run-on sentences?
- What relationship can you show by the way you choose to revise a comma splice or run-on sentence?

There are so many options to create clearer, seamless writing. Use one of the options detailed here to correct comma splices and run-on sentences in your writing, effectively connecting the ideas in your sentences.

Parallel Structure

Chapter 5: Section 4, Lesson 7

Winston Churchill inspired the British people with these lines during the darkest days of World War II:

We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.

Not only did Churchill's lines stir the nation, but they also provide an excellent example of *parallel structure* (*parallelism*)—using the same patterns or grammatical forms to show that related ideas are equally important, as Churchill does by repeating *We shall fight.*

Parallel Structure With Lists of Words and Phrases

A list of words should use the same grammatical structure like this:

The Yeti likes hiking, snowshoeing, and cooking.

This group of words (*hiking, snowshoeing, and cooking*) has parallel structure because each word is an *–ing* verb acting like a noun (called a *gerund*). Notice also that the three words are separated by commas and joined by *and* before the last word. Here are more examples:

- *The Loch Ness Monster has been known to scare fishermen, to hide in the mist, and to avoid cameras.*
- *The Loch Ness Monster has been known to scare fishermen, hide in the mist, and avoid cameras.*

Again, these sentences have parallel structure because the lists use the same forms. The first uses *to + verb* (known as the *infinitive* form) while the second uses the base form of the verb. However, writers sometimes struggle with parallel structure when they mix forms like this:

Bigfoot has been photographed walking in the woods, eating a candy bar, and to chase tourists.

This sentence doesn't have parallel structure because the first two parts feature *–ing* verbs (*walking, eating*) while the third part is a different structure (*to chase*). It doesn't matter whether the list is at the end or the beginning of the sentence either; parallel structure is still necessary. Sentences without it sound awkward and don't flow as well:

Quickly, quietly, and in a sneaky manner, get away before the Yeti sees you.

This sentence doesn't have parallel structure because two *–ly* adverbs are grouped with the phrase *in a sneaky manner*. Here's a better version with parallel structure:

Quickly, quietly, and sneakily, get away before the Yeti sees you.

Parallel structure isn't just for lists of words and short phrases; it's also required when longer phrases are grouped together:

The scientist said that the specimen was not a Yeti because it walked on four legs, ate plants, and its hair wasn't long enough.

Here, the first two phrases start with past tense verbs (*walked, ate*), but the third phrase takes a different form, so the structure isn't parallel. Here's the corrected form:

The scientist said that the specimen was not a Yeti because it walked on four legs, ate plants, and had short hair.

Parallel Structure with Clauses
The same ideas apply if you use a group of clauses (groups of words having both a subject and verb). Stay consistent with your grammatical form to maintain parallel structure. Here the structure doesn't remain consistent:

The explorer told her followers that they should get enough rest, that they should drink plenty of water, and to watch out for monsters.

Notice that the last part of the list (*to watch out for monsters*) is just a verb phrase instead of a clause like the first two. Check out these potential fixes to maintain parallel structure:

- *The explorer told her followers that they should get enough rest, that they should drink plenty of water, and that they should watch out for monsters.*
- *The explorer told her followers to get enough rest, drink plenty of water, and watch out for monsters.*

You'll always have options for fixing parallel structure. Choose whichever form of a word, phrase, or clause works best so that your writing is consistent.

Parallel Structure with Correlative Conjunctions
Some pairs of words require special attention—the correlative conjunctions *Not only/but also, either/or, neither/nor,* and *both/and.* When using them in your writing, make sure the two parts have the same grammatical form. This example uses a *complete sentence* with each part of a correlative conjunction:

Not only *does Doctor Grant believe in jackalopes,* **but** *he* **also** *leads teams to search for the elusive creatures.*

In this example, just verb phrases are used:

Doctor Grant **not only** *believes in jackalopes* **but also** *leads teams to search for the elusive creatures.*

Or you can use two nouns as this example does:

Doctor Grant believes in **not only** *jackalopes* **but also** *unicorns.*

The same rules apply with the other three sets of correlative conjunctions:

- **Either** *Bigfoot* **or** *the Yeti left these huge footprints in the snow.*
- *Early in the morning,* **neither** *boating* **nor** *swimming should be attempted in Loch Ness.*
- **Both** *taking photographs* **and** *shooting videos would help prove that Bigfoot exists.*

Using similar structure, such as clauses, phrases, or words, after each of the conjunctions shows that the sentence parts are equally significant. To see more on

correlative conjunctions (discussed here) and coordinating conjunctions (discussed below), see Conjunctions.

Parallel Structure with Coordinating Conjunctions
The seven coordinating conjunctions (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*) are used to link words, phrases, and clauses. When using a coordinating conjunction (which you might remember from the acronym *FANBOYS*), make sure the ideas on both sides of the conjunction are parallel. Again, your goal is to use the same form of words or the same grammatical structure. Here, a coordinating conjunction (*and*) has verb phrases on each side:

She advised me to find some new friends and forget about what I saw.

This use of parallelism shows that the phrases beginning with *find* and *forget* are equally important. Here's another example:

The joy of discovery is exciting, but the joy of exploration is exhilarating.

Again, by using complete sentences on both sides of the coordinating conjunction (*but*), the ideas are shown to be equally important.

Think About It

- Where in your essay do you see lists of words or phrases that aren't yet parallel?
- What ideas within sentences would you like to show are equally important?
- Which correlative or coordinating conjunctions in your essay might need to be checked for parallel structure?

You don't need to be Winston Churchill to use parallel structure. You only need to review your ideas and ensure that closely related or equal thoughts are written in the same grammatical form.

Using Modifiers Precisely

Chapter 5: Section 4, Lesson 8

Carl Sandberg wrote
The fog comes
on little cat feet.

It sits looking
over harbor and city
on silent haunches
and then moves on.

Sandberg's modifiers create a specific, clear picture in the reader's mind. With modifiers, sentences are more interesting, vivid, and engaging. However, carelessly used modifiers may make sentences more confusing, awkward, or illogical.

Defining Modifiers
A modifier is a word or phrase that describes, qualifies, or limits another word or phrase. Adjectives modify nouns and pronouns:

- *The **green** car stopped at the **red** light.* Here, *green* and *red* are adjectives that describe *car* and *light,* respectively.
- *The horse, **gleaming with sweat**, galloped to the barn.* The phrase *gleaming with sweat* describes *the horse.*

Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs:

- *He ran **quickly** to catch the bus.* Here, *quickly* describes the verb *ran.*
- ***After we walked home**, it started raining hard.* In this sentence, *after we walked home* describes the verb *started,* explaining when the rain began.
- *The song the orchestra performed was **very** long.* Here, *very* describes how long.
- *The snow piled **very quickly** on the sidewalk.* Here, *very* is an adverb describing *quickly,* another adverb that explains how the snow *piled*.

Misplaced Modifiers
Misplaced modifiers are improperly separated from the word(s) they modify; as a result, the sentences are confusing and may sound awkward or outlandish. Consider this example from Groucho Marx:

One morning I shot an elephant in my pajamas. How he got into my pajamas I'll never know.

Here, *in my pajamas* (the adjective phrase) is next to *elephant.* Marx doesn't mean that the elephant is inside the pajamas, though. The subject (*I*) is. Thus, one revision option might read, *One morning while still in my pajamas, I shot an elephant.*

Similarly, consider this sentence:

John walked home after Lois rejected him in silence.

The words *in silence* (the adverbial phrase) are next to *after Lois rejected him*, implying that Lois rejected him without saying a word. That doesn't fit! Instead, the

sentence should read: *After Lois rejected him, John walked home in silence.*

Adverbial modifiers are also misplaced sometimes. Check out the different meanings created when the adverb *only* is moved in these sentences:

- *The judge only hears complaints on Mondays.*
- *The judge hears complaints only on Mondays.*

In the first sentence, the judge hears nothing else on Mondays except the complaints. In the second, the judge hears many issues throughout the week, but if you want to share complaints, you'd better come on a Monday since he won't listen any other day. As with adjective modifiers, placing the adverb close to the word it's meant to describe makes your meaning clearest. For more insight, see [Adjectives](#) and [Adverbs](#).

Dangling Modifiers
These are modifiers that describe nothing in particular; they *seem* to describe, but the object or action they actually describe is missing from the sentence:

To get into Yale, the SATs needed to be better.

This sentence doesn't say who needs better SAT scores. Revised, the sentence could read

To get into Yale, Joaquim needed better SAT scores.

Other Modifiers
When used correctly, other modifiers can help clarify or emphasize material:

- ***Limiting modifiers***, such as *almost, even, just, merely,* and *only,* should be placed right before or after the words they modify: *The court hears civic cases on Fridays* **only**.
- ***Summative modifiers*** emphasize a particular point as it summarizes or renames a key word or phrase: *Economic changes have reduced African population growth to less than zero,* **a demographic event that will have serious social implications.**
- ***Free modifiers*** describe a phrase that refers back to something earlier in the sentence and can be moved somewhere else in the sentence without changing the meaning. A comma comes before the phrase when it ends a sentence: *Achilles killed the minotaur,* **chopping off its head**. A comma comes after the phrase when it begins a sentence: **C***hopping off its* **head**, *Achilles killed the minotaur.*

On the other hand, some modifiers must be carefully placed to avoid misunderstanding or confusion:

- ***Squinting modifiers*** accidentally refer to two words. If a modifier squints, readers won't know whether it modifies the word before or after it. To revise, place the modifier where it clearly relates to a single word: *Musicians who practice consistently will improve.* The meaning here could be that the practicing is consistent, or it could be that the improvement is consistent. Readers won't know unless the modifier stops squinting: *Musicians who practice will* **consistently** *improve.*
- ***Disrupting modifiers*** interrupt connections between parts of a sentence, making it difficult for readers to follow the train of thought: *Vegetables will, if cooked too long, lose most of their nutritional value.* A possible revision

is *If cooked too long, vegetables will lose most of their nutritional value.*

To see other ways modifiers are used, consult [Infinitives](#).

Using *Good*, *Well*, *Bad*, and *Badly*
Spoken language is often different from written language. Some modifiers used in daily conversation won't work in formal writing, but others will. When you speak, you can use *good* and *well* or *bad* and *badly* almost interchangeably. Either of these pairs of examples would be acceptable in casual conversation:

- *I feel **good**.*
- *I am **well**, thank you.*

- *I feel **badly** for your loss.*
- *I feel **bad** for your loss.*

In academic writing, though, you'll need to be more careful. To understand how to use these modifiers correctly, you'll need to take a close look at your verbs. *Good* and *bad* are adjectives, and that means you'll use them after linking verbs like *is, smell, feel, taste*, and so on.

- *My feet **smell bad** after my yoga class.*
- *The new dog **was bad** when he ate the organic hot dog buns.*

Well and *badly,* however, are considered adverbs. You'll use them after action verbs like *bowl* or *skip* or *sleep.*

- *The retired CEO **surfs badly**.*
- *My younger daughter **skips well**.*

Because many people use the adjective and adverb forms interchangeably in casual conversation, it can be difficult to relearn the rules for formal writing, especially with the use of the word *well.* In specific circumstances, *well* can be used as an adjective referring to health. That is, if you've been feeling ill and someone asks if you're finally feeling better, you could certainly say, *I'm well now. Thanks for asking!*

Remember that the key to correctly using *good*, *well*, *bad*, and *badly* lies with your verbs. If your verb is an action verb, like *surfs* or *skips*, then an adverb is needed. If, on the other hand, you use a linking verb—such as *am* or *was*, you need an adjective.

Think About It

- Where could modifiers help make your sentences more interesting?
- When should you revise the use of modifiers to emphasize or clarify a point?
- When should you use *good* instead of *well* or *well* instead of *good?*

Using well-placed adjectives and adverbs will create interesting sentences, engage your readers, and emphasize or explain a point. Know the rules of modifier placement to avoid confusing or misleading sentences.

Sentence Unity and Clarity

Chapter 5: Section 4, Lesson 9

Sentences are the most vital units of written English. What you do with sentences depends on your purpose for writing as well as your audience's expectations and needs. If your sentences have unity, there's a better chance that your project can clearly and concisely fill your purpose, expectations, and needs.

Sentence Unity
As you construct and revise sentences, focus each sentence on one point, allowing readers to follow your sentences and make the connections you intend:

The paper is about government corruption, so it is lengthy.

Although there are two ideas within this sentence—(1) the paper is about government corruption and (2) it's lengthy—*so* unifies the sentence, showing the relationship between the two ideas. The use of the word *so* implies that there is quite a bit to say about government corruption, which helps keep the sentence limited to one clear point. But, how do you get a series of unified sentences to flow together into effective writing?

Cohesion
Cohesion is what makes your sentences *stick to each other* or *cohere*. It gives reader a sense that your sentences fit together smoothly so that each leads logically to the next. To achieve both cohesion and sentence unity, try looking at each sentence by itself before examining how sentences fit together within a paragraph and within the writing as a whole.

Old-New Construction
One way to make sentences cohere is to use the technique of old-new construction. For instance, a sentence may begin with information familiar to your readers, perhaps with material you just mentioned or with information you can assume they know. Then, you can end the sentence with information your readers don't anticipate or that's more difficult to understand, such as lists, technical words, or complex conditions. This technique works for paragraph construction as well.

The black mamba is the most dangerous snake to people because it lives in trees and strikes at the speed of light.

Your readers probably know that mambas are snakes or at least animals, but the reason they're dangerous is new information. Rather than delivering only the new information and causing confusion, the sentence coheres (is unified) because it begins with what's familiar.

Keeping the Focus
It's easy to lose or confuse readers if you switch topics or don't clearly connect topics within a sentence. Sometimes, you won't even notice you're doing it:

Cool fall weather is my favorite time of year for apple cider, which I buy at a local orchard.

Actually, *fall weather* isn't really a *time of year*; it's a season. Readers might also have difficulty determining why apple cider is a favorite during fall weather and why the writer mentions that it comes from a local orchard. A revised sentence

would connect these ideas more effectively:

Fall weather is the best for enjoying orchard-fresh, warm apple cider because drinking it dispels the chill.

Creating and maintaining a clear link between the two thoughts (*fall weather* and *warm apple cider*) keeps your focus on a single topic and makes the statement that much easier to understand.

Sentence Clarity
When you're writing and rewriting sentences, be aware of consistency and completeness; consistent structure and complete sentences allow your readers to follow your thoughts.

Complete Sentences
Most of the time, writing should express complete thoughts and ideas. When you're typing, though, it's easy to lose control of your sentences, creating incomplete expressions:

I am trying to write this paper. Although I don't understand the assignment.

The first sentence here is complete, but the second isn't actually a sentence at all —it's a dependent clause that ends incorrectly with a period, also known as a fragment. Create clarity with complete sentences:

- Drop *although* and make two sentences: *I am trying to write this paper. I don't understand the assignment.*
- Join the clauses with a different conjunction (*but*) in a single sentence: *I am trying to write this paper, but I don't understand the assignment.*
- Move the dependent clause to begin the previous sentence: *Although I don't understand the assignment, I am trying to write this paper.*

To find more information on avoiding fragments, see [Incomplete Sentences: Fragments](#), [Complete Sentences](#), and [Top 10 Writing Concerns](#).

Simplified Sentence Structure
You can also revise sentences for clarity by altering their structures. For example, avoiding a sea of modifiers that hide your point can make your sentences smoother and clearer:

Blissfully unaware of the crowded chaos raging outside in the deluge of wind-driven rain and hell-tossed hail, the young student boldly, fearlessly tossed on his old, yellow, travel- and age-worn jacket, eagerly and gleefully pulled open the sturdy oaken door, and stepped into a puddle.

A clearer, stronger version wouldn't be as adrift:

Unaware of the storm outside, the student slipped on a jacket, opened the door, and stepped into a puddle.

For more information, see [Sentence Types](#).

Subordination and Coordination
Careful use of subordination and coordination can help you create the clear,

flowing sentences readers need to see:

We went to the zoo. We saw the tigers. We saw the bears.

If you want to show relationship, create a subordinate clause: *We went to the zoo, and we saw the tigers **after we saw the bears.*** In this revision, *after* is a subordinate conjunction showing the relationship between the ideas in the last two clauses. Other conjunctions you might use are found in [Dependent Clauses.](#)

You can also use coordinating conjunctions (FANBOYS*: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*) to join related ideas: *We went to the zoo, **so** we saw the tigers **and** the bears.*

The coordinating conjunction *so* links the two sentences on either side of it, uniting them around the single idea of doing two things (*went* and *saw*).

Conciseness
You can keep your writing clear by using words concisely, or efficiently. Many writers believe using more words makes them sound intelligent or academic. But don't fall for that: Readers need you to write in a clear, concise way, or you'll risk losing them entirely. For more on writing concisely, see [Wordiness.](#)

Syntax
The arrangement of words within a sentence (*syntax*) creates clear meaning. Examine sentences for missing words or words and phrases that disrupt the expected arrangement. You can't get away with writing the way Yoda from *Star Wars* speaks:

Always with you what cannot be done. Hear you nothing that I say?

A revision makes the syntax smoother (albeit less epic):

You always focus on what cannot be done. Don't you hear anything I say?

The sentence now follows a more recognizable pattern, so it can be easily understood by more readers.

Think About It

- What techniques could create unity within and between your sentences?
- In what ways can you use words, phrases, and clauses to keep ideas flowing smoothly and clearly?
- Where could you simplify and combine ideas to be more concise?

Well-written English sentences generally communicate one main idea. You can express that idea more effectively in sentences that are unified and clear.

Sentence Variety

When you write, do you notice that your sentences tend to sound the same? Writing every sentence in a paragraph by beginning it with *The*, for instance, can end up sounding monotonous. On the other hand, sentence variety can make your writing more engaging for your reader. In fact, this opening paragraph uses a variety of sentences in the hopes that you find this discussion interesting enough to continue reading!

Basic Sentence Types
While you may not realize it, you already vary your sentence types in everyday communication. Using statements, questions, exclamations, and commands—the four basic kinds of sentences—can create variety in your writing.

- Declarative: *I am worried about my hair.*
- Interrogative: *Am I worried about my hair?*
- Exclamatory: *I am worried about my hair!*
- Imperative: *Do something about my hair.*

The rhetorical question is a fifth type of sentence that can be a useful tool in an academic essay. A rhetorical question implies that the reader will answer it the way that you intend, reinforcing your argument.

Rhetorical question (to the woman whose hair is soaked by rain and is on her way to a formal dance): *Aren't you worried about your hair?* Expected answer: *Of course, I am!*

When you revise for variety, you'll mainly be looking at the structure of your sentences. While most of your writing will be statements, it's sometimes useful to interject questions and even make a few commands. To see more details on the different types discussed here, refer to Sentence Types.

Using a Variety of Structures
To understand the effect of repeating patterns on your reader, consider the purpose of most nursery rhymes. Combined with rocking and warm milk, no baby can fail to fall asleep while hearing the repeated rhythmical patterns in *Hush, little baby, don't say a word/Mama's gonna buy you a mockingbird*. Because you don't want your readers to fall asleep reading, you can use a variety of structures. Look at this example:

I went to the store and bought bread, milk, and cheese. I went home, made an omelet, and drank a glass of milk. After that, I read, cleaned the bathroom, and took a nap.

Notice the writer has opted to use the same kinds of sentences in this example. In the first two sentences, the writer has begun with a subject (*I*), which is closely followed by a verb (*went*). Even though the third sentence begins with an introductory element, the pattern of three in a series (*read, cleaned the bathroom, and took a nap*) sounds monotonous. When revising for structure, you may notice places where you can add information to improve your meaning:

I bought bread, milk, and cheese at the store. After I went to the store, I went home and ate an omelet and drank a glass of milk. With a full stomach, I relaxed and read the newspaper for little while. Since that made me feel guilty, I decided to clean the bathroom. Cleaning the bathroom was exhausting, so I took a nap.

Altering the sentence structure gives this passage a more vigorous pace. In this case, the writer uses a combination of the simple subject/verb pattern along with introductory clauses and compound sentences that contain more than one independent clause. This variation creates an irregular pattern that keeps the reader interested.

The Periodic Sentence
A periodic sentence builds up to a climactic main clause, often by stacking two or more parallel structures earlier in the sentence. Since many sentences save the most significant impact for the end, periodic sentences really help emphasize that important information. These kinds of sentences are designed to use suspense to maintain a reader's attention, so they are often surprising. Here's an example from Walker Percy's *The Message in the Bottle*:

Why is it that a man riding a good commuter train from Larchmont to New York, whose needs and drives are satisfied, who has a good home, loving wife and family, good job, who enjoys unprecedented "cultural and recreational facilities," often feels bad without knowing why?

This sentence's main idea is asking: "Why does a man feel bad?" Percy has separated the subject of this question—*man*—from its verb and object—*feels bad*—with a good many details about that question, revealing he's asking about a *very specific kind of man.* The information suspended between the sentence's subject and verb makes this sentence periodic.

Trick of the Periodic: Interrupting Clauses and Phrases
Periodic sentences are generally built with a series of interrupting clauses or phrases. Let's look at a sentence by American author Annie Dillard:

The literature of illumination reveals this above all: although it comes to those who wait for it, it is always, even to the most practiced and adept, a gift and a total surprise.

The main idea of this sentence is that *the literature of illumination is a gift and a total surprise*. The clauses that break this information up in Dillard's true sentence hold the predicate of this simple sentence at bay, keeping it up in the air like a juggler's orange.

Remember to keep the purpose of your writing and your audience in mind when revising your sentences. Since these examples come from personal essays, they tend to be more informal, but you can certainly use interrupting clauses and phrases in academic writing. For example, you can move overt transitional phrases like *for example* and *in conclusion* from the beginning of sentences to the middle of sentence.

The Cumulative Sentence
While most sentences begin with a clear subject (what the sentence is about) and a clear predicate (what the subject is doing), you can also build interesting sentences with modifiers, or descriptions, in what's called a cumulative sentence. These sentences begin with straightforward declarations and then add on modifying details, refining the main statement:

I can easily walk ten, fifteen, twenty, any number of miles, commencing at my own door, without going by any house, without crossing a road except where the fox and the mink do: first along by the river, and then the brook, and then the meadow and the wood-side.

In this passage, Henry David Thoreau gradually adds on details, refining the first idea expressed. Notice the main information is that the speaker *can easily walk . . . any number of miles . . . without going by any house*. Everything that follows that statement is meant to elaborate on that main idea, providing a wealth of descriptive details.

Think About It

- Where can you revise to use different sentence types that add variety?
- What other kinds of sentences can you use to vary sentence structure?
- What more complex sentences would you like to include as you continue to refine your writing?

Varying sentence structure and the types of sentences you use will make your writing more engaging for you to write and for your readers to read.

Building Your Writing Style

Chapter 6: Lesson 1

If you compare samples of your writing from your younger days to more recent samples, you may find that your writing reflects more wisdom or maturity. In addition, you may find shifts in your vocabulary or how you express the same emotion. These are all reflective of your writing style: the specific way you articulate your ideas. *Style* generally refers to how you present yourself in your written work. It takes time to develop your style as a writer, but it will be immensely rewarding.

Defining Style

Some writers define style as how you arrange your words while others writers believe that style is simply being clear. Still others say that you can develop your own style by learning and imitating the work of great writers.

Each writer has a personal style, one consciously developed for different writing situations. In other words, you can write with a stronger style by paying attention to the words you choose and the way you arrange them. Your writing style will often demonstrate different levels as well as varied quality, or clarity.

Levels

You're probably already used to switching between different levels of style. For example, you might greet a friend on a street with *Hey, how's it going?* You wouldn't use the same words for your boss, though. Instead, you'd probably say something like: *Hello, how are you?* One greeting is informal while the other is formal. The first reveals a friendly connection with a friend who is an equal while the second reveals a polite connection with an employer who is a superior in a working relationship. You may not realize it, but you make judgement calls about levels of style all the time.

You write informally in

- personal letters
- emails to friends or family
- personal journals or diaries
- narrative stories

You write formally in

- official reports
- emails to supervisors or professors
- letters to a newspaper or media editor
- most college writing assignments

Taking the time to consider how formal your writing style should be will help you address your audience in an appropriate manner. It will also help you put your best foot forward in certain circumstances. In other situations, you'll communicate your ideas more clearly by considering how you already relate to your audience. For more on addressing your audience, see [Analyzing Your Audience](#) and [Audience Types](#).

Quality

Quality of style most often means clarity, which occurs when sentences are correct and concise. Quality also means choosing the most precise words for the meaning that you want to convey and editing your work to revise inappropriate words or phrases. Knowing your own style is important for your growth as a writer. If you

believe you can control your writing style by making conscious choices, you'll be a more powerful writer.

For example, consider the following two samples from a business email. Which one demonstrates a higher level of quality?

- *Hey there: How's it going? I need you to call me ASAP about your account. Please call me, okay?*
- *I hope you are doing well. I'd like to talk to you about your account at your earliest convenience. Please call me at (555) 555-5555. Thank you!*

Most people would agree that the second example reflects a higher quality of writing: it's more suited to the nature of the communication, and it uses standard writing conventions rather than slang or casual writing found in peer-to-peer communication. Any reader can instantly understand the communication without having to translate the jargon or slang.

One reason to be concerned about the quality of your writing style is that employers need (and more often promote) employees with a clear writing style. A variety of professions (architecture, engineering, medicine, law, teaching, and support services) require employees to write regularly, and poor or unclear writing reflects negatively on their employers.

Your Writing Style
How do you know that you have a personal writing style? Interestingly, you've been developing your writing style since you first learned to write. You may have had instructors who recognized your writing even when you forgot to put your name on your paper or bosses who recognized your work even when your name wasn't on the finished product. That's because your writing style, or the choices you make about arranging your words, is particular to you, just like your handwriting, your sense of fashion, or your hairstyle.

In the past, you may have paid more attention to your clothing or hairstyles than to your writing style. In fact, you may have believed that your writing style wasn't under your control. Fortunately, you can control your style through word-, sentence-, and paragraph-level choices that will make your writing more concise, powerful, and interesting.

Your writing can speak volumes about you. If your boss is reading a piece you wrote, for instance, could he or she make an accurate judgment of who you are and what you are capable of? Making more conscious decisions about your style will ensure that your writing is not only recognizable but also a point of pride for you.

Think About It

- How would you describe your personal writing style?
- If someone had never met you, what would he or she say about you based on your writing style?
- What are some things you can do to develop your own style in your writing assignments?

Writing style includes both levels and quality of writing. A strong style that you develop and practice consciously will shape your writing for different audiences and purposes, making you a stronger and more engaging writer.

Point of View

Chapter 6: Lesson 2

Let's say you've been asked to write an essay about which American president was the most effective. How should your thesis look?

I think George Washington was the best president this country has ever had.

You could say that George Washington was an amazing president.

George Washington was the most effective president this country has ever had because he could rally popular support for difficult choices during the nation's founding years.

Which sounds more polished and authoritative? Most people would say the third one. This is because it takes on a more detached and academic point of view by using the third person rather than the more casual first person (*I*) or second person (*you*) points of view.Whether or not you realize it, you choose a point of view every time you write an assignment. Picking the most effective point of view (first, second, or third) helps you set the tone for your paper.

Point of View

You've likely already been asked to write a research paper, a personal narrative, a lab report, or an essay analyzing an element in a short story, novel, play, or poem. You've also written letters, emails, and journal entries. These writing assignments and projects have different purposes, but each one requires a different tone and point of view. A person's point of view is that person's opinion. A writer's point of view, however, is a bit different.

The three major points of view are first, second, and third. The personal pronouns a writer uses determines his or her point of view. Each set of pronouns places a focus either on the speaker *(I)*, the reader *(you)*, or the topic.

First-Person Point of View

The first-person point of view (*I, we*) always puts the most focus on the speaker, or writer. It's effective for essays about personal experiences. Although you can write a narrative about yourself in the third person, the result is generally awkward and less natural than when you use the first person for such projects. When you write about yourself, you become a character in your story. For instance, consider the following paragraph from a personal essay written entirely in the first person:

When I graduated from high school, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do with my life. It wasn't until I worked for a few years that I realized I wanted to become a nurse. To do that, I needed a college degree.

Because this essay talks about a personal experience, the first-person point of view is appropriate.

Second-Person Point of View

The second-person point of view (*you, your*) puts the reader in the foreground of the writer-reader exchange. It should be avoided in first-person essays because it can so easily cause a shift in point of view. A shift happens when writers unintentionally use more than one point of view. If, however, you are writing to advise your readers, as you would in an essay explaining methods or procedures, the second person may be appropriate. Check out this example of a passage from a process essay on how to train for a 5K race:

When you decide to train for a 5K race, it's important to pick out a training plan

that fits your current level of fitness. By looking at how much you currently exercise, you can decide what training plan is the best place to start.

In this case, the pronoun *you* engages the reader to think about where he or she should start training for this race. Using the second person here engages the person reading the essay.

Third-Person Point of View

The third-person point of view (*he, she, it*) is most commonly used for expository writing, technical writing, and any other sort of writing that has an academic, business-minded, or persuasive intention or purpose. In the third person, the focus shifts away from the writer to the subject. Has a teacher ever asked you to omit a phrase like *I think* or *I believe* from a sentence? If so, that's because, when you're writing in the third person, the speaker (writer) is secondary to the idea being expressed. You need to keep the focus on your ideas, so take yourself out of the sentence.

If you think about it, the only real difference between *I think it is going to snow* and *It is going to snow* is that the *I* in the first example shifts the focus of the sentence to the speaker rather than the fact that it's going to snow. This difference makes the second sentence seem far more authoritative than the first.

Here's an example written only in the third person:

While his decisions often flouted the Constitution, Abraham Lincoln made the choices needed to preserve the Union during the time of Civil War. For these reasons, he was the greatest president of the United States of America.

This passage describes a scene in which neither the writer nor the reader participate. The focus is on Lincoln and his leadership. Using the third-person point of view highlights the details in this passage and emphasizes the facts, making the passage more convincing.

Think About It

- Where should you use first-person point of view make your writing appropriately personalized?
- When is second person needed to engage the reader with your writing?
- When should your point of view shift to third person to provide a more authoritative voice?
- Where do you need make changes so point of view is consistent?

With the appropriate point of view, you can set the tone for your work by focusing on your experiences, engaging directly with your reader, or disengaging to focus on your information. The appropriate point of view helps your writing address your audience and assignment more effectively!

Consistent Tone and Voice

Chapter 6: Lesson 3

When you read a well-written piece, it's as if you can almost *hear* what the writer has to say. This is often the result of the writer's tone and voice. Being consistent in tone and developing your voice strengthens your writing and helps you appropriately address different audiences.

Voice

Your *voice* includes qualities of your writing that distinguish it from any other writer's style. This voice comes from the decisions you make about the subject matter and the way you approach your topic. Think of books in a series, whether they are in a trilogy or a longer collection. You may notice writing habits that give the writing a certain *feel*. Perhaps the author uses long sentences or quaint language or includes a lot of parentheticals. Combined, these habits produce a *voice:* an individual writing style that is like no other. Finding your own voice means playing with your own method of expressing yourself on paper. Studying style—both your own and other people's—will help you find your voice (read more about [Building Your Writing Style](#)). One very important element of developing your voice is *tone.*

Tone

Imagine this scenario: You've just cleaned the entire house for your parents. You've picked up old magazines and dirty dishes, dusted, vacuumed, and even cracked open new air fresheners. Your mother walks in after a long day at work, and, looking around, says, *I just can't believe this!* Your mother's tone will convey pleasure.

But what if your mother came home earlier than you expected, before you had time to clean up a big mess you'd made? She could use the same words—*I just can't believe this!*—but she would communicate something very different in tone. Her facial expressions, body language, and the pitch and volume of her voice would convey this difference.

In written English, tone means much the same thing as it does in spoken English. It refers to *how* something is said as opposed to *what* is said. The term *tone* describes the writer's attitude about himself or herself, the audience, or the subject. Because writers can't rely on body language, their written tonal cues must be very clear. Word choice is one important way to indicate your tone. Consider the following examples:

- *The President died*. (This states a simple fact.)
- *The President was killed*. (His death was not from natural causes.)
- *The President was murdered*. (Someone intentionally caused it.)
- *The President was assassinated*. (He was still acting as the leader of the country at the time and was likely killed for political reasons.)

One small change in word choice can make a world of difference in your tone and in the meaning of your sentence. As a writer, you will determine your word choice and tone based on your purpose and your intended audience (to see more, refer to [Audience Types](#)). Academic essays generally require a more formal tone unless they're personal narratives.

Staying Consistent

Your tone will be influenced by decisions you make before you even begin to write an essay. Your essay's purpose and audience will determine your tone, so you should have some sense of what your purpose and audience are. For example, a

personal essay may require a more informal tone that uses the first-person point of view and contractions. A literary analysis paper for your English class may require a more formal, authoritative, and academic tone.

No matter what you're writing, you'll want to communicate a sense of authority over your subject matter; an inconsistent tone will undermine your authority. In a literary analysis paper, for example, you'll need to refer to the work you're analyzing and to academic criticism of that work. You'll use the more detached third person to set the appropriate formal tone for academic writing. For example, if writing about Ambrose Bierce's "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," you would avoid informal conventions, such as contractions. Using the incorrect point of view or conversational writing will undermine your authority as a critic, as seen here:

I was just blown away at the ending to "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge." You totally won't believe how Bierce ends this story. It's a complete surprise!

This example focuses too much on the writer's response to the text and too little on the text itself. It undermines the writer's credibility by straying too far from the essay's intention, which is to analyze the short story by talking about the devices the author uses in it. The first- and second-person point of view are far less formal than the assignment requires, so the writer's tone seems too casual and juvenile to present an informed position. Here's a revised example:

Ambrose Bierce uses a non-linear plot and stream of consciousness to create an effective plot twist in this short story.

This revision is an improvement because it maintains the third-person point of view, which authoritatively discusses the use of literary devices in this short story. See [Point of View](#) for more on this topic.

On the other hand, if you're writing a personal essay about an experience that changed your life in some way, it's not only appropriate to use the first person and to choose more informal words, it's probably preferable. This is because personal essays have a different purpose than academic essays: they require you to communicate your own personal experience.

When I was little, I begged for a dog. My parents resisted, knowing that I was not fully prepared to take on the responsibility of caring for another living thing. On my twelfth birthday, however, they relented. While I was more mature by then, nothing could have prepared me for the journey my labradoodle, Wilbur, and I were about to take.

Because the writer is talking about a first experience with dog ownership in a narrative essay, using the first-person point of view makes sense because it creates a more personal and intimate tone where the reader is privy to the writer's thoughts.

Think About It

- What can you do to ensure that your tone is consistent throughout a piece of writing?
- Which words, carefully chosen, will convey the tone you want to express?
- How can you continue to develop your own voice as a writer?

Voice is the unique style a writer uses to communicate his or her ideas. *Tone* is the attitude a writer communicates toward his or her subject and audience. Continue

to work on experimenting with tone and finding your voice as a writer!

Word Choice

Chapter 6: Lesson 4

In *The Triggering Town*, the American poet Richard Hugo says, "I caution against communication because once language exists only to convey information, it is dying." Hugo, of course, isn't telling his readers *not* to communicate when they speak and write; instead, he's urging them to do *more* than communicate. Beyond just delineating facts, words should emphasize the power a writer has to create emotional associations, concreteness, precision, accuracy, intimacy, and accessibility.

Denotation and Connotation

Every word has two levels of meaning—a *denotation* and a *connotation*. The *denotation* of a word is its literal meaning, or dictionary definition. For instance, the noun *mother* simply means "a female parent." Deepening this word's literal definition, however, is its *connotation*—its implied meaning, or the emotions most readers associate with it. Layering in the connotation of *mother* generates a rich mental picture of all-embracing love, comfort, warmth, and home—a distinctly positive image.

A word's connotation may be *positive*, *neutral*, or *negative*, which means that words with equivalent denotations can deliver entirely different messages. Look at these illustrations:

- *Albert's mother is a **thrifty** shopper.*
- *Albert's mother is an **economical** shopper.*
- *Albert's mother is a **penny-pinching** shopper.*

Although the sentences in this list share the same literal meaning—Albert's mother is *careful not to waste money* when she shops—the connotation of the adjective in each statement differently impacts reader response and interpretation. While the first sentence suggests admiration for the way Albert's mother spends her money, the second offers a more objective observation, and the third labels her as unnecessarily reluctant to part with money. As you can see, a word's connotation is a tool that the powerful author can manipulate to control audience emotion and impact overall tone.

Concrete/Precise and Abstract/Vague Words

When you notice the meanings and associations of words, you can't help but see that words are *symbols*, or abstractions representing real things and actions. Because words are necessarily removed from the concepts that they represent—and from the audience reading them—using *concrete words* can help you bring your readers into more direct and immediate involvement with your ideas.

Concrete words are words that you can almost see, touch, smell, taste, or hear: *smoke, velvet, garlic, salt, wind chime.* Because such words convey the same rich and precise ideas to individuals across settings and experiences, they are easy to understand. Verbs describing actions are concrete because they're easy to "see" or otherwise experience: *sway*, *dance*, *grimace*, *burn*, *murmur*. Though less concrete than nouns and action verbs, adverbs and adjectives can be concrete if they describe other words in a perceptible manner: *sneeringly, bumpily, fishy, spicy, blaring.*

Unlike concrete words, *abstract words* refer to concepts that can't be experienced with the physical senses: *acceptance*, *liberation*, *love*, *prejudice*, *responsibility*. Because these words have different meanings across time, cultures, and

individuals, readers must work harder to relate to these ideas.

Using concrete words transforms your sentences by making your ideas more vibrant and easier to understand, as demonstrated here:

- Abstract: *After his dream, the scared boy decided to seek comfort from his mother.*
- Concrete: *After waking from his nightmare, the trembling preschooler crept into his parents' bed and snuggled himself up to his mother's warm body.*

Note that the more concrete a word choice, the more precise it becomes: *Waking from* is more precise than *having*, and *trembling* is more precise than *scared*. Because the language is more concrete, readers can better imagine the child, the dream, and the means of comfort:

- The child is not just a *boy*; he is a *preschooler.*
- He didn't have a mere *dream*; he had a *nightmare.*
- He didn't seek just any form of *comfort*; he crept *into his parents' bed and snuggled himself up to his mother's warm body*.

Concrete and precise wording makes the audience do less work by giving them a vivid scenario.

Other Word Choice Considerations
In addition to fitting your purpose and audience, your word choice must also be accurate.

Homonyms and Homophones
Homonyms are words that share the same pronunciation and spelling but have different meanings. For instance, *ground* ("the surface of the earth") is pronounced and spelled the same as *ground* ("to prohibit an aircraft or person from flying") and *ground* ("reduced to fine particles through crushing"). Because homonyms share the same spelling, they aren't as great a concern as *homophones. Homophones* are words that sound the same but have different spellings and meanings. Just a few of these confusable words include

- *bare/bear*
- *hear/here*
- *it's/its*
- *principal/principle*
- *their/there/they're*
- *to/too/two*

Using the wrong one of these same-sounding words will change a sentence's meaning. Consider these sentences, which express vastly different ideas:

- *The rug was bare skin.*
- *The rug was bear skin.*

While the second rug might lie in a log cabin, the first exists more appropriately in a horror story. To ensure accurate expression, take care to select the correct option when choosing among homonyms, or refer to [Common Homophones and Homonyms](#) for more ideas.

Long Words
Some people erroneously believe that the "best" word to use in a sentence is

always the longest or most complex because it makes the writer appear more intelligent. In reality, short, everyday words make text accessible, direct, and clear. Look at the following pair of sentences:

- *The precipitous prominence ascended beneath the illumination of the natural satellite.*
- *The steep mountain rose in the light of the moon.*

Both these sentences describe the same image of a mountain, but the second is more effective in its description. Not only does the first sentence sound pretentious, but it's also so complex that the audience's interest and understanding fade as they try to interpret it. Limiting the use of long words, as in the second sentence, can keep readers interested and your meaning clear.

Euphemisms

Euphemisms are expressions commonly used to make statements less offensive or harsh. For example, a person fired from his job may claim to be the victim of a *workforce imbalance correction*. The military describes a civilian death as *collateral damage*, and hospitals report patient death as a *negative patient-care outcome*. These expressions deceitfully mask reality and create distance between your audience and your ideas. Avoid them in academic writing.

Jargon

Jargon is specialized language used by members of particular groups or professions. Only individuals who are highly familiar with computer technology, for instance, are easily able to comprehend terms like *Secure Sockets Layer (SSL)* or *Virtual Private Network (VPN).* Your use of jargon will depend on your audience and purpose. If you write about computers to a group of computer experts, you probably won't need to define any of the technical language. On the other hand, if you write about computer technology to an audience unfamiliar with it, you'll need to define the jargon or avoid it completely.

Slang and Slang Syntax

Slang is very informal language. Like jargon, it's meant to communicate ideas in a specific context or group. Slang often consists of figurative language, like the adjectives *cool* or *wicked*, which both to refer to something unusually popular or good. Slang expressions help define their speakers and are fine in informal speech, but they're too informal and too audience-specific for use in an academic essay.

Archaic Words

Archaic words—such as *albeit*, *perchance*, *therewith*, and *withal*—are no longer used in everyday language. Unless they're used ironically or in an appropriate context (like in a legal document), archaic words produce an artificial and pretentious tone that most readers won't appreciate. It's best to avoid them unless your purpose requires such language.

Think About It

- Which words carry connotations that reinforce your intended meaning?
- What concrete and precise words vibrantly and directly express your ideas?
- What words should you use—or avoid—to increase the accuracy and accessibility of your writing?

Considering these questions as you choose your words will enable you to assert your power as a writer, impact your reader, and do more than simply communicate information through your composition. As Richard Hugo also states, "If you want to

communicate, use the telephone."

Formal and Informal Language

Chapter 6: Lesson 5

What's the best movie you've ever seen? How you answer the question depends on who's asking, right? Let's say your English professor asks. The answer might look like this:

The Shawshank Redemption, *which was directed by Frank Darabont, mixes award-winning acting with powerful themes, creating a gripping experience for the viewer.*

But if your best friend asks, you might answer like this:

The Shawshank Redemption *is the best! Morgan Freeman nailed it. I'd watch it again any time.*

In the first answer, the word choices are more formal while the second answer uses informal language. Several choices separate formal and informal language.

Formal Language Uses Third-Person Point of View

You probably noticed in the examples above that the informal one uses *I* (first-person point of view), while the formal uses third-person point of view, referring to *viewers* instead of *I* or *me.* Formal language also avoids second-person point of view (*you*). Rather than referring directly to readers, formal writing uses third person:

- Less formal: *You can discover the truth through experiments.*
- More formal: *Researchers can discover the truth through experiments.*

Referring directly to readers (*you*) seems overly conversational and can be confusing as not all readers may relate to the situation being described: *When giving birth, you must consider the cleanliness of the environment.*

Switching to a more formal third-person statement looks like this: *When giving birth, women must consider the cleanliness of the environment.*

Formal Language Avoids Conversational Word Choices

While the formal example above says the movie was "a gripping experience for the viewer," the informal example says it "is the best!" These choices illustrate one of the differences between formal and informal words. Similarly, writing that "Morgan Freeman nailed it" is far more informal than writing about the "award-winning acting." Formal writing won't sound like speaking.

Formal Language Avoids Contractions

In formal essays, you won't use contractions; you'll write out the words instead. In the examples above, the informal writing includes the contraction *I'd*. Watch for contractions in formal writing, and replace them by spelling out the complete words. As a bonus, avoiding contractions makes it easier to identify apostrophe errors because you won't need to search through the apostrophes in contractions. Consider this very common error: *The soundtrack was at it's best near the end of the movie.*

Taking a closer look at this sentence, you probably see that *it's* means *it is*. You would never write *The soundtrack was at **it is** best near the end of the movie*, so that tells you the apostrophe is unnecessary for the possessive (something belonging to *it* is written *its*). Avoiding contractions might help you catch this common mistake.

Formal Language is Easily Understood

Writing in a formal, academic style doesn't mean using the biggest, fanciest words you can find. Exactly the opposite is true. In *On Writing Well,* William Zinsser says, "Clutter is the disease of American writing." And William Strunk writes in *The Elements of Style,* "Omit Needless Words."

Consider the formal example above again:

The Shawshank Redemption, *which was directed by Frank Darabont, mixes award-winning acting with powerful themes, creating a gripping experience for the viewer.*

And now consider a wordier alternative:

The Shawshank Redemption, *which was directed by Frank Darabont, merges award-winning dramatic performances with potent thematic choices, generating a transfixing experience for the observer.*

The second example reads like a thesaurus exploded. Choosing rarely used words doesn't make writing more formal—it makes writing more difficult to understand. Formal writing doesn't use slang, but it doesn't require multi-syllabic words at every opportunity either.

Formal Writing Avoids Slang and Shorthand
If Hamlet had a Smartphone, he might have texted, *2 b or not 2 b.* Formal writing, however, completely avoids shorthand. Even words like *thru* (instead of *through*) are considered misspellings. Writing essays is different than texting; much like answering a question in class is different than chatting with your friends. Slang terms, such as writing that a car is *sweet* or that a new band is *cool,* should also be avoided in formal writing.

Some Academic Writing is Not Formal
If you're writing a personal essay, such as a reflection or a narrative, informal language is preferable. Personal essays have different purposes than argument or expository essays. (For more on these essay types, see [Writing a Narrative](#) and [Writing an Argument Essay](#).) Instead of convincing readers to think differently or exploring a concept in depth, you're sharing about yourself. In personal essays, using first person, contractions, and conversational word choices are all encouraged. Using too formal a style in personal essays can cause you to seem aloof or standoffish, which might make your readers doubt your sincerity. Consider this introduction to a personal reflection paper: *As one traverses through existence on this planet, one finds that errors are a common occurrence.*

The formal language doesn't make you want to jump in and read more, does it? Now how about this less formal introduction to a personal reflection: *I've done some foolish things in life, but I've realized that I'm not alone.*

See the differences? The less formal example uses first-person point of view and contractions, and it sounds more natural and conversational, making it more engaging as part of an informal essay.

Think About It

- What type of essay has been assigned—does it seem more formal or more informal?
- What specific instructions has your professor given about contractions and point of view?
- When tempted to use conversational words, what replacements can you try instead?

Writing in an informal style isn't a death knell for your formal essay. Writers often create early drafts in more natural, informal language, shifting to more formal wording in later drafts. As you near the end of the drafting process, look to make your language match the assignment goals and intended audience.

Wordiness

Chapter 6: Lesson 6

Because writing assignments often include a minimum word count, writers may find themselves adding words just for the sake of the count, or in order to sound more "academic." In truth, nothing makes sentences duller than wordiness—the use of many words when few would convey exactly the same meaning. Take care to avoid wordiness, which can creep into sentences in many ways.

Empty Additions

Sometimes writers add a word (or a syllable to a word) hoping to make that word stronger. This does not always work.

- For instance, *stalling for time* means exactly the same thing as *stalling*. "To stall" actually means "to delay action in order to gain time," so *stalling for time* means *delaying action in order to gain time for time!*

- *Overexaggerate* means *exaggerate*. If *Henry exaggerates his symptoms to get the day off,* he claims they're more serious than they actually are. Since to exaggerate is to overstate, to "overexaggerate" is to "overoverstate," which makes no sense.

- *The honest truth* vs. *the truth.* Everyone knows what the truth is. Can there be a dishonest truth? No, so *honest* adds nothing.

- *Past experience* vs. *experience.* Who would cite experience not yet experienced?

In each case, looking at the definition of the word will tell you if it needs the "extra" you're considering adding. Here are some additional examples:

- *fewer in number* vs. *fewer*
- *until such time as* vs. *until*
- *false pretense* vs. *pretense*
- *irregardless* vs. *regardless*
- *free gift* vs. *gift*
- *added bonus* vs. *bonus*
- *advance warning* vs. *warning*
- *actual facts* vs. *facts*
- *bald-headed* vs. *bald*
- *blend together* vs. *blend*
- *bouquet of flowers* vs. *bouquet*
- *basic fundamentals* vs. *fundamentals*
- *eradicate completely* vs. *eradicate*

And this is only a partial list! However, sometimes words may be used metaphorically, in which case the rules change. *Bouquet of flowers* is wordy, but *bouquet of bananas* isn't because *bouquet* isn't being used literally. Eliminate similar empty additions from your writing.

Helicoptering with Adverbs

Intensifying adverbs and adverbial constructions (see Adverbs) will clutter your sentences if used unwisely. For example, you might quote someone, saying, *"You're doing excellent work," she said encouragingly.* Since her words are literally encouraging, the adverb adds nothing.

Expletive Constructions

Beginning sentences with *It is* (where *it* does not have an antecedent) and *There is* or *There are* will always create wordiness. Consider the first draft of the following sentence:

There is a pack of coyotes roaming my neighborhood at night. It is dangerous situations like this that

make me want to keep my cat indoors.

Now, take a look at the revision:

A pack of coyotes roams my neighborhood at night. Dangerous situations like this make me want to keep my cat indoors.

Ridding sentences of these expletive constructions will tighten them up.

Taking the Long Way Around

Sometimes writers are tempted to use two words when one would do, thinking that the longer phrase sounds more learned. The truth is, if the extra words don't improve on the few, then the sentence will sound—and be—cluttered. Here are just a few examples:

because	*due to the fact that, for the reason that, owing to the fact that, because of the fact that*
now	*at this point in time, at present*
over	*over and above*
although, though	*despite the fact that, regardless of the fact that, notwithstanding the fact that*
if	*in the event that, if it should happen that*
about	*in reference to, in regard to, as regards*
can	*is able to, has the capacity to, has the capability of*

The list is endless. There is no difference in meaning between the following examples:

*My dog **has the capability of** playing frisbee with herself **due to the fact that** she can run faster than the thrown frisbee.*

*My dog **can** play frisbee with herself **because** she can run faster than the thrown frisbee.*

But there's a big difference in readability. When you're tempted to substitute a long, high-sounding phrase for a humble word like *if*, trust that humble word.

Think About It

- What is the exact word needed for your meaning?
- Which adverbs are necessary? What do they add besides word count?
- Which phrases in your sentences could be expressed as a single word?
- Which words will be most effective when choosing quality over quantity?

As George Orwell said, "If it is possible to cut a word out, cut it out." Your readers will thank you!

Active and Passive Voice

Chapter 6: Lesson 7

In English, verbs don't only have tenses—they also have voices. While tense has to do with time, voice is all about the relationship between the subject of the sentence and the action of the verb. No matter what, the subject of a sentence is in the spotlight: The grammatical subject is the person or thing that the sentence focuses on. (See Choosing the Right Subject.) Choosing to use active or passive voice is a matter of style, depending on whether you need to emphasize the subject or action in your sentence.

The Difference Between Active Voice and Passive Voice
If the sentence is in the active voice, then the subject *is doing the acting*. If the sentence is in the passive voice, then something or someone else *is acting upon* the subject. When deciding whether to use active or passive voice, you can look at any action in two different ways. For example, if you want to tell someone about your aggressive cat, you have two choices. First, you could start by focusing on the cat, making the word *cat* the grammatical subject of the sentence:

My cat has just caught a squirrel.

The other choice is to start by talking about the squirrel, making the word *squirrel* the grammatical subject of the sentence:

Look! A squirrel has been caught by my cat!

In *My cat **has** just **caught** a squirrel,* the active form of the verb *catch* shows that the grammatical subject did the action. In *A squirrel **has been caught** by my cat*, the passive form of *catch* shows an action done **to** the grammatical subject.

The verb ***has caught*** is in the *active voice;* the verb ***has been caught*** is in the *passive voice*.

Some other active/passive sentences might read as follows:

* *My cat chases squirrels. / Squirrels are chased by my cat.*
* *My cat will never catch a squirrel. / Squirrels will never be caught by my cat.*
* *My cat may have injured that squirrel. / That squirrel may have been injured by my cat.*
* *My cat was chasing dogs last week. / Dogs were being chased by my cat last week.*

The active and passive verbs are in the same tense, but you'll notice also that the active sentences are shorter and simpler than the passive sentences. This makes the active sentences more direct.

Forming the Passive
You can see from the examples above that a verb in the passive voice always has two elements.

* A form of the verb *to be*.
* The past participle (sometimes called *passive participle*) of the main verb. For more information, see Participles.

Intransitive Verbs
Some verbs can't be made passive because they're intransitive, which means that they cannot take a direct object. Remember that the direct object receives the action of the verb in the active voice (In *I gave my love a rose, I* does the action, while *rose* is the thing given.) The direct object works as the subject of a passive sentence (*A **rose** was given to my love*). Intransitive verbs can't take a direct object, so they can't become passive. Take a look:

* *To die*: You cannot die something, but you can kill it. *To kill* is a transitive verb.
* *To sleep*: You cannot sleep somebody, but you can stupefy him. *To stupefy* is a transitive verb.

- *To sit*: You cannot sit anyone, but you can seat her. *To seat* is a transitive verb.

Choosing Between Active and Passive

Sentences written in the active voice tend to be more engaging and often less wordy. *Max is writing his sweetheart a letter right now* is direct; *A letter is being written right now by Max to his sweetheart* is cluttered with extra words and forces readers to think primarily about the letter instead of sweet, lovesick Max.

Also, the active voice is often clearer and more honest than the passive. The passive voice is sometimes used, whether deliberately or subconsciously, to avoid assigning responsibility for an action.

The sentence *Electronic cigarettes are marketed as perfectly safe* avoids naming the entity doing the marketing; *The manufacturers of electronic cigarettes market their product as perfectly safe* puts the group responsible for this decision front and center by making it the subject of the sentence.

While the active voice is usually preferable to the passive, the passive voice does have some legitimate uses, regardless of what grammar-checking software suggests. The rule is not *Always use the active voice.* The rule is *Use the active voice* **if there is no good reason to use the passive voice.**

When to Use the Passive Voice

- **The actor is unknown:** *Mr. Boddy* **was murdered** *in the billiard room* is preferable to *Someone murdered Mr. Boddy in the billiard room.* The word *someone* really doesn't add information to the sentence. Unless you know who or what caused Mr. Boddy's death, there's no need to use the active voice.

- **The person or thing being acted upon deserves to be highlighted:** Even when the actor is known, you'll sometimes wish to emphasize the person or thing that was acted upon. *That innocent and generous man* **was cut** *down in the prime of his life by a cowardly miscreant, Colonel Mustard.* In the active voice form (*Cowardly miscreant Colonel Mustard cut down that innocent and generous man in the prime of his life*), Colonel Mustard, like all subjects, takes center stage. The passive voice lets the acted-upon noun become the focus of the sentence.

- **The actor does not matter:** On the other hand, the actor may have secondary importance. Consider this sentence: *A specific lunar eclipse* **cannot be observed** *from everywhere on earth.* Now, look at this one: *All humans on earth* **cannot observe** *a specific lunar eclipse.* In the first sentence, the passive voice construction is more direct. The *observers* are not nearly as important as is the fact that eclipses are visible only from certain vantage points.

- **The document's purpose mandates the passive voice:** Scientific and technical papers often require the passive voice simply because the actors (those doing the actions) are the writers, and their writing rightly focuses on actions and results of study or experiments. If you read *Ten ccs of HCL* **were poured** *into a beaker,* you'll correctly assume that the experimenters or their agents were the ones doing the pouring. Use of the active voice here (*Drs. Johnson and Murphy poured ten ccs of HCL into a beaker*) diverts attention from the experiment itself. Instead of focusing on this step of the experiment, readers start imagining the experimenters at work—because the sentence puts them in the spotlight.

Think About It

- What makes the active voice preferable to the passive voice in most cases?
- Which passive sentences need to be active?
- Where should you purposefully use the passive voice in your writing?

Choosing between the active and passive forms of verbs can take some practice, but once you're

comfortable with the two voices, you can express exactly what role your subject plays in any sentence.

Choosing the Right Subject

Chapter 6: Lesson 8

A well-structured, correctly punctuated, grammatically impeccable sentence is not necessarily a strong sentence. To be truly effective, your sentence should be engaging, clear, and concise. The most important step to writing sentences that keep readers engaged involves **choosing the right subject for each sentence**.

The subject of a sentence—the noun, noun phrase, or pronoun that is either doing something or being something—helms that sentence. (Find out more in [Subjects](#).) Whatever you choose as the subject of a

sentence will be in the spotlight, in command. For this reason, when setting up your sentences, make sure that their subjects deserve that spotlight.

Abstract vs. Concrete Subjects
If the spotlight shines on an **abstract noun** rather than a **concrete** one, you risk writing a lackluster, uninvolving sentence.

A concrete noun denotes something that can be sensed (seen, heard, smelled, touched, tasted); an abstract noun denotes a concept or idea, something that most people can agree exists but which isn't a physical entity. Check out these examples:

- **Concrete:** heart, mayor, dentist, shark, bacterium, Eiffel Tower, Turkey, turkey, screwdriver, toddler, clock, ace of diamonds
- **Abstract:** love, politics, dentistry, species, infection, architecture, nationality, celebration, engineering, childhood, time, luck

Abstract nouns, which are often formed from verbs (*infect* and *infection*, *celebrate* and *celebration*), can be useful but tend to wither in the spotlight. Compare these two sentences:

- *The overabundance of abstractions being chosen as the subjects is responsible for sentences burdened with wordiness and a lack of involvement.*
- *When writers choose abstract nouns as subjects, their sentences are wordy and unengaging.*

Both sentences mean exactly the same thing, but the second version is shorter, livelier, and more effective. The first sentence is all about *overabundance*; the second is all about people. The first may sound more elevated and more sophisticated since it uses a lot of long words, but it isn't. Most readers will have to read through it at least twice to figure out what the writer means. Good writing is clear, direct, and uncluttered. Placing people, places, or concrete things at the helm of a sentence will naturally result in a sharper, less wordy structure.

Another advantage is that choosing the right subject for a sentence often causes readers to think more deeply and in more detail about the point of that sentence. Compare these two sentences:

- **Hilarity** *dissipated when* **a trick** *was employed by Bertha's father to show her the* **consequences** *of poor* **dental hygiene***.*
- *Bertha stopped laughing when her father blacked out his two front teeth to show her what would happen if she did not brush regularly.*

Note that putting a person (Bertha) in the spotlight forces the writer to provide more concrete details about what her father's teaching style actually was. He didn't just use "a trick"—he actually fooled her into thinking his front teeth were missing! The second version is much more memorable—and much more concrete— than the first.

As shown above, sentences with concrete subjects tend to be more direct, engaging, and full of illustrative detail than sentences with abstract subjects.

Abstract Nouns Can be the Right Subjects
Abstract nouns exist for a reason. If you want to write about a concept rather than about a specific example, then that concept should helm your sentence. When Emily Dickinson wrote

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches on the soul

she was focusing on hope itself. She was inviting her readers to think about this thing—this intangible

but very real thing—and she used the most direct, clear, and engaging way to do it.

If your sentence is truly about an abstract thing, then shine the spotlight on that thing.

Choose the Right Subject for Your Purpose
If you're writing a definition essay, chances are your purpose will be to define an abstract noun—*honestly, integrity, irony*. In such cases, some of your sentences will rightly have that abstract noun, or a related one, as their subjects. But when you need to provide examples which illustrate your definition of that noun, you'll naturally choose concrete subjects, as in this example:

Personal integrity *involves living by strong moral principles, even when doing so is costly.* **Parents** *who lie about their home address in order to get their children into a better school may benefit in the short run, but their* **children** *will grow up believing that the ends justify the means.*

The first sentence is abstract because it's about a concept—personal integrity. In contrast, the second is concrete since it discusses topics that can be sensed—the parents and their children.

Or consider a comparison and contrast essay about bassets and poodles. One body paragraph might begin this way:

For the older, more sedentary owner, **differences in temperament** *make bassets clearly preferable to poodles.* **Basset hounds** *love to do two things: eat and sleep.* **Poodles** *are often too excited to do either.*

Here, the paragraph begins with an abstract focus on differences. It goes on to become more concrete and specific when it discusses each animal in turn.

Think About It

- Where should the spotlight shine as you choose appropriate subjects?
- Where do you need to adjust your sentences' subjects to become more concrete?
- Which subjects really do need to be abstract?

Keeping your readers engaged starts with the subjects of your sentences. Choosing the right subjects comes with some careful consideration on what needs to be the focus of each sentence. Whatever you choose, make it clear.

Figurative Language

Chapter 6: Lesson 9

Do you have a favorite poem? What about a beloved song? Many of the most memorable songs and poems rely on *figurative language* to create powerful images and show us things in new ways. Consider these lines from one of Emily Dickinson's better-known poems:

"Hope" is the thing with feathers—
That perches in the soul—
And sings the tune without the words—
And never stops—at all.

Dickinson uses figurative language here to compare hope to a bird. You can use figurative language when you say something that's not exactly, literally, what you mean. In fact, figurative language is the spice of life. (That's a *metaphor*!) And the world would be a dull, empty place without it. (There's some *hyperbole*!) Generally speaking, figurative language consists of comparisons and exaggerations used in nonliteral ways.

Comparisons

Your writing becomes more interesting to readers when you show rather than tell, and comparisons are an effective way to show. (To see more about essays that need to show rather than tell, see Writing a Narrative.) Let's say you wish to describe a rowboat in a pond. You could write, *The rowboat drifted across the*

pond.

Or, you could try figurative language (a *metaphor* in this case): *The tiny boat drifted across the pond, a leaf gently floating on the water.*

Get the picture? No, really, imagine the second example in your mind. What can you see? What image does it remind you of? That's the point of figurative language —to help readers see things, or see things differently. Figurative language in the form of comparisons isn't new either. The Beatles used them: *It's been a hard day's night, and I been working like a dog.*

And even Jesus used them: *I am the good shepherd.*

Comparisons aren't just for stories or descriptions either. They work just as well in persuasive or expository writing. Let's say you're writing about a country's growing national debt:

- *The national debt is like an anvil poised above a flea.* (*simile*)
- *The national debt is an anchor threatening to drag the country under water.* (*metaphor*)

Figurative Language Instead of Modifiers
You often use adjectives and adverbs to describe. You might write that a sunset is *beautiful* (*adjective*) or that a kiss is *terribly* messy (*adverb*). But because these modifiers do not *show* us what the sunset looks like or how messy the kiss is, they aren't as effective as figurative language. Try replacing some modifiers with figurative language:

- *The glimmering horizon seemed to reach up and pull the setting sun toward it.*
- *The room looked like a clothing store and toy shop had crashed into each other.*

Exaggeration
Figurative language also works by exaggerating or understating. You've probably done it:

- *This suitcase weighs a ton.*
- *I'm starving!*
- *It's only a flesh wound.* (After suffering a serious injury)

Exaggeration (*hyperbole*) and *understatement* are effective because, just like comparisons, they show readers something in a new, unexpected way. Writing a narrative about an event that changed your life, you might use exaggeration like this: *I felt like my world had ended.*

Exaggeration isn't as effective in more formal writing, such as in persuasive or expository pieces, because it may cause readers to question your credibility:

The national debt will turn everyone into poor peasants scraping by with almost nothing.

This certainly creates a vivid picture, but a writer who exaggerates like this in a formal argument won't be taken seriously.

Bring It to Life
Along with comparisons and exaggeration, figurative language brings nonhuman things to life by giving them human qualities (*personification*). Again, writers can show readers something in a fresh way by including this type of figurative language:

The thick, black dirt seemed to dance and sing as the plow turned it over.

Since soil neither dances nor sings, giving it these qualities provides readers with a new perspective on freshly plowed dirt.

Like Dr. Frankenstein, you can bring anything to life, making your writing more interesting:

- *The national debt has wrapped its fingers around the nation's throat.*
- *My computer buzzed and whirred, trying its best to tell me that it was working as hard as it could.*

Problems with Figurative Language
Some comparisons stick around for so long that they become stale with overuse. If you've heard a phrase several times, it's best to find a new way to describe something. Here are some commonly **overused** examples of figurative language:

- *Black as night*
- *Blue as the sky*
- *Like a bull in a china shop*
- *Like a train wreck*
- *Like sand through an hourglass*
- *Raining cats and dogs*
- *Slept like a baby*
- *Dry as a desert*

Think About It

- What comparisons can you use to show your ideas in new ways?
- Where in your writing have you used adjectives that you could replace with figurative language?
- What overused comparisons do you need to replace in your writing?
- What are you trying to *tell* readers in your writing? Where can you *show* instead of *tell*?

Figurative language clarifies and amplifies meaning, keeping readers interested in your writing by presenting ideas in new ways.

Using a Computer's Checker Tools

Chapter 7: Lesson 1

While tools like spelling and grammar checkers can be helpful for a writer, they aren't foolproof. Because these tools are literal, they can't appreciate nuances in language, and they don't catch all mistakes. However, you can overcome the limitations of these tools and use them to strengthen your writing.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Using a Computer's Checker Tools
The electronic checker tools on a computer—such as a spellchecker, a grammar checker, and a thesaurus—can be useful if you're using a computer for word processing. A spellchecker highlights words that aren't spelled correctly and offers alternative spellings. A grammar checker can identify sentences where subjects and predicates disagree, while a thesaurus provides a list of words with meanings similar to the word in question.

Yet there are limitations to these tools. For example, a spellchecker can check only the spelling of words included in its word bank, which isn't comprehensive. A grammar checker often marks a sentence as incorrect without explaining why or how to correct it. A thesaurus only provides words, not their usage or definition. Writers must use these tools carefully and with a critical eye.

Using a Spellchecker More Effectively
A spellchecker is only as good as the electronic list of words that's programmed into it. Unfortunately, most electronic lists are rather brief. As a result, you should supplement what a spellchecker checks with your own efforts in proofreading. Many words in English sound the same but have different meanings and different spellings. For example, *there* indicates a place, while *their* is a possessive pronoun that indicates something belongs to someone. In addition, *they're* is a contraction of *they are*. The words *to/too/two* also sound alike but have different meanings.

While *to* is used as part of a verb or as a preposition, *too* means *also*, and the word *two* is a number between one and three.

Because a spellchecker won't know which homophone you intend or which word fits with your meaning, it won't highlight a wrong word if it's still spelled correctly. For instance, if you said *to or three* when you meant to say *two or three*, the spellchecker wouldn't indicate a misspelled word. Therefore, make sure you proofread for homophones and look them up in a dictionary. You can also refer to [Common Homophones and Homonyms](#) for help.

Consider proper nouns as well, or nouns that refer to specific people, places, things, and ideas. For example, the names of historical figures, such as *Elizabeth Cady Stanton*, or little-known cities, such as *Wauwatosa, Wisconsin,* are generally not included in most standard spellcheckers. As a result, you'll need to manually proofread these words, checking them with a general Internet search, a map, or other reliable source to make sure they're spelled correctly.

Finally, you may inadvertently often type a word incorrectly. What if you meant to type *abate* but instead typed *bat?* The spellchecker won't highlight the word *bat* because it's correct—at least in its spelling.Be sure to manually proofread for intended meaning; refer to [Editing and Proofreading](#) to find out more about pinpointing similar misspellings.

Using a Grammar Checker More Effectively
A grammar checker, like a spellchecker, is only as good as the program that's been written for it. Because there's an exception or two for almost every rule, very few grammar checkers are always reliable. So if you consult a grammar checker, use it with caution! Consider this sentence:

The group of students is going to the museum.

A grammar check may mark this sentence as incorrect, as it would link the plural noun *students* with the singular verb *is*. However, this sentence is correct, as the verb works with the noun *group*.

At other times, a grammar checker might suggest a sentence is ungrammatical because it's long when, in fact, the sentence is grammatically correct. In other words, a grammar checker can often be outright incorrect in the suggestion it offers, so examine each suggestion in light of a well-written grammar handbook, considering your intended meaning.

Using a Thesaurus More Effectively
On the surface, a thesaurus can seem like a writer's dream: It offers synonyms—words with similar meanings—to use as alternatives for more common words. For example, when you look up the word *many* in an electronic thesaurus, words such as *legion*, *innumerable*, *myriad*, *sundry*, and *multitudinous* are listed as synonyms. However, *many* has a slightly different meaning than *innumerable*, which is different from *sundry*. Although all of these words are synonyms for *many*, their use depends on the context of their sentences as well as the writer's intended meaning. Therefore, check the dictionary definition of a word suggested by a thesaurus before using it as a replacement for its synonym in your writing.

Think About It

- Which words are technically misspelled even though your spell checker didn't catch them?
- When using a grammar checker, what do you need to be on the lookout for

when revising?
- Which words should you cross-check between a dictionary and thesaurus to say exactly what you mean?

Writers' tools are just that: tools. Ultimately, it's up to you—not the computer—to decide what changes to make! While these tools are useful, keep in mind their limitations and know how you can use them more effectively.

Keeping a Writer's Error Log

Chapter 7: Lesson 2

You've tried so many different instructors and classes to improve your writing, yet you're human and you still make mistakes. It's okay! Even the most experienced writers have errors that plague them. Using an error log can help you address those lingering concerns.

Defining the Error Log
First, what is an error log? It's a record of the types of errors you make most often. You can use feedback from your instructors, peer review, tutoring sessions, and even your own knowledge to make a list of your common writing errors. An error log is a useful tool to create stronger writing.

This list may change from time to time, and it should. Think of it like a bank. You deposit one error, learn how to fix it, and as it occurs less frequently, you withdraw it from the bank—the list of errors. Keep in mind that this list includes punctuation and usage errors, and sometimes spelling errors. Avoid listing any issues related to development, structure, or other assignment-specific information.

Creating an Error Log
As noted above, this is a bank of sorts that helps you keep track of the writing-related errors you make so that you can fix them. You can either keep an electronic version or print out a copy; just use the format you're most comfortable with. After all, this is about you helping you!

Here's a sample error log:

Sentence with a Mistake	Description of the Problem and Solution	Corrected Sentence	What to Look for
Joes shoes got	Missing apostrophe to	*Joe's shoes got dirty.*	-s that shows

dirty.	show possession; add an - 's to indicate the shoes belong to Joe.		possession
The dogs runs fast on the track after the cat.	*Dogs* (subject) is plural; *runs* (verb) is singular. Plural subject goes with plural verb; singular subject goes with singular verb.	*The dogs run fast on the track after the cat.* **OR** *The dog runs fast on the track after the cat.*	mismatched subject and verb

The other rows would be filled in as more common errors become apparent.

Using an Error Log
Compiling the log is one thing, but now what? After you've written a piece, then you can use the error log to help you revise. There are several sources to begin your list:

- **Instructor feedback:** When you get a paper back, your instructor will probably at least point out an error or the prevalence of one. You can use that information to fill in the first column.
- **Tutor feedback:** When you get feedback in a tutoring session—from a face-to-face encounter, a LIVE session, or even an asynchronous submission—the errors that a tutor addresses can also help you determine problems or concerns.
- **Peer feedback:** When you receive feedback from your peers, including just having a friend look things over, you can add issues to the list as well.
- **Your own knowledge:** You know yourself and your writing, and you can trust yourself and use the notes you've made in your own work, encountered in your proofreading or construction, or noted in conversation.

These tools will help you fill out the log. Then, as you read through the next paper you write (for any assignment), keep common errors in mind. You may have to read through a paper more than once because it's challenging to catch every error the first time around.

Think About It

- What should you do to help find and revise errors in your writing?
- What sources will help you compile a list of errors?
- What common errors will be helpful to place on your error log?

An error log is an empowering tool that writers use to help determine, locate, and revise grammar and mechanical errors. Using comments from your instructors, a tutor, or peer review sessions is a good plan, as is remembering your own notes. Listing a particular error, defining the error and its solutions, correcting the sentence, and labeling the type of error can help make revision easier.

Using a Dictionary and Thesaurus

Chapter 7: Lesson 3

Words are the building blocks of communication and writing, so if you aren't using the most appropriate word, your meaning and message could easily become lost. Dictionaries and thesauruses are two of the most important tools writers use to choose the most effective words, and these resources are probably right at your fingertips for free—either online, in a mobile app, or even embedded within your word processing program. Let's take a closer look at how best to use these tools to improve your writing.

Using a Dictionary to Choose the Right Word
Dictionaries aren't just resources to turn to when you hear or read a new word; they're useful tools for checking on words you already know, too. Dictionaries will show you how words are meant to be used, spelled, and pronounced.

The Collegiate Dictionary
If you're writing academic or professional documents at a high school level or beyond, a good all-purpose dictionary to use is one with the word *collegiate* in the title. The amount of information and detail for each entry will vary depending on whether you're using a pocket paperback format, a larger hard-cover format, a website, or a mobile app, but each format should provide information about the pronunciation, spelling, and most common usages of each word. Consider this sentence from an essay on the dangers of overusing social media:

*The more you focus on your personal life, the less you will focus on being online on social websites like Facebook or Twitter, and the less quality time you will **loose** with friends.*

A spell checker won't note it, but the word *loose* is not the correct word for this context. A dictionary, however, will clarify if you've misused or misspelled a word. In an entry from a pocket collegiate dictionary, *loose* has multiple definitions. (To find bibliographic information for this pocket dictionary and the other resources covered below, see [References](#).) Feel free to start with the first entry, which usually defines how the word is most commonly used:

loose \'lüs\ *adj* **loos-er; loos-est 1** : not rigidly fastened **2** : free from restraint or obligation **3** : not dense or compact in structure **4** : not chaste : LEWD **5** : SLACK **6 :** not precise or exact – **loose-ly** *adv* **– loose-ness** *n*

The entry starts with the word's pronunciation and its part of speech: it's an adjective used to describe things that are "not rigidly fastened." That doesn't work in the sample sentence, though. That sentence needs a word that looks like *loose* but that describes a "loss" of something, like quality time with friends. By scanning further down the dictionary page, you'll likely find this word:

lose \'lüz\ *vb* **lost** \'lost\; **los-ing** \'lü-zin\ **1** : DESTROY **2** : to miss from a customary place : MISLAY **3** to suffer deprivation of . . .

Since the sentence above is about missing quality time with friends and family, *lose* is the correct word. The abbreviation *vb* after the pronunciation guide notes that this word is a verb—an action word describing the action of missing or being deprived of quality time with friends.

Online versions of dictionaries or mobile dictionary apps provide the same information but can be even more useful as they may provide audio files allowing you to hear how a word is pronounced as well as quick links to related words that

might be more appropriate.

The English Learner's Dictionary
If you're new to the English language or are looking for more concrete examples of word usage, then this type of dictionary will be more helpful. It also comes in print and electronic versions, and you can use a term like *English learner's dictionary* to search for it online. For instance, if you're curious about how the word *loose* should look in a sentence, this entry from an online learner's dictionary should be helpful:

loose
adjective pron-us /luːs/

NOT FIXED
not firmly fixed:
There were some loose wires hanging out of the wall.
One of my buttons is loose.

CLOTHES
large and not fitting tightly:
a loose dress/sweater

Both the pocket dictionary and the online dictionary clearly show that *loose* isn't the right word for this sentence. A better choice is

*The more you focus on your personal life, the less you will focus on being online on social websites like Facebook or Twitter, and the less quality time you will **lose** with friends.*

A learner's dictionary definition like the one above is helpful for understanding how a particular part of speech, like an adjective, works in a sentence. In this case, the examples showcase how an adjective is used to describe a noun or subject, whether that be wires, a dress, or some buttons.

Some online learner's dictionaries even help you translate the word you're researching.

Other Dictionary Resources
If you want to know more about the ways words, images, language, and symbols work within your own and other cultures, there are different kinds of dictionaries that might appeal to you. This list is just a sampling of the dictionaries you could look for:

- Usage dictionary
- Rhyming dictionary
- Visual dictionary
- Historical dictionary
- Etymological dictionary
- Slang dictionary
- Specialized dictionaries (i.e., *Dictionary of Symbolism*)

Using a Thesaurus to Choose the Right Word
Like a dictionary, a thesaurus also comes in pocket paperback, hard cover, and electronic versions. It doesn't define words and explain their usage but rather provides a list of words and phrases that could be used in the place of a chosen word. Writing can become dull very quickly if you use the same words repeatedly within a single sentence, paragraph, or essay. Strong writers vary their word choices and seek out words that carry just the right meaning or emphasis for the point they want to make. A thesaurus can help you find words that add a slightly

different feeling or nuance to a sentence. This is the case with the sentence from the social media essay:

*The more you **focus** on your personal life, the less you will **focus** on being online on social websites like Facebook or Twitter, and the less quality time you will lose with friends.*

The repetition of *focus* may lead to boredom or—even worse—to conflating the importance of one's personal life with time spent on social media, causing a misinterpretation of the sentence's central meaning. A thesaurus will point to a different and better word to capture a more accurate nuance of meaning. To find different parts of speech and definitions for *focus*, you can refer to its synonyms, or words with the same meaning. For example, an online thesaurus includes the following words and phrases as words related to *focus*:

center, fasten, rivet, aim, direct, hone (in on), nail, point, set, zero (in on), attend, heed, mind, fixate, obsess (over)

Since there is a variety to choose from, you can try them all before deciding. For example, you may prefer to change the wording in the second spot.
Using *fixate* will fit better because it has a feeling of being fixed or stuck to the Internet, without the ability to tear yourself away. This is the feeling the sentence is going for. If you still aren't sure about one or more of these words, look them up in your dictionary for further clarity.

Revising the Sample Sentence
After consulting the dictionary and thesaurus to correct the misuse of *loose* and avoid the repetition and potential misinterpretation of *focus*, the sentence becomes

The more you focus on your personal life, the less you will fixate on being online on social websites like Facebook or Twitter, and the less quality time you will lose with friends.

Now this sentence carries more power and persuasion for the reader.

Think About It

- How do your words *sound* when you read your sentences aloud?
- Which words *look* wrong even though your spell checker has not selected them?
- Which words should you use to create the feeling and connotation you want in your sentence?
- How might a different word change the sound or feel in the sentence?

Not only will regularly consulting a dictionary and thesaurus while you write strengthen your essays, but it will also help improve and expand your vocabulary and mastery of the language.

Glossary of Writing Terms

Abstract: An abstract is a brief summary and description of a paper. It usually comes after a cover page, and it tends to be one or two brief paragraphs that outline what the paper discusses and its key points. Different formatting styles (APA, MLA, Chicago/Turabian) have different rules for abstracts.

Active Voice: A sentence written in active voice has a subject that directly performs an action. Active voice engages readers more effectively and is considered more direct than passive voice.

Adjective Clause: An adjective clause is one used to describe a noun or pronoun. *The driver in* **whose car I was sitting** *was surprised to see me there* includes an adjective clause.

Adverb Clause: An adverb clause is one used to describe a verb, a noun, or an adjective. **Wherever you go,** *there you are* contains an adverb clause.

Anecdote: An anecdote is a short story that relates to your topic. Anecdotes often work to either grab the reader's attention or to illustrate a point or example. They can be very useful for introducing essays.

Annotated Bibliography: An annotated bibliography presents a list of sources much like a works cited or references page. However, it also includes a short (1-2-paragraph) discussion after each source. This discussion summarizes the key concepts in the source and evaluates the credibility/quality of the source. If part of a larger research project, the annotations also explain the source's relevance to the project.

APA Style: APA style is a method of formatting papers and citing sources that's commonly used in the social and behavioral sciences.

Argument Essay: An argument essay uses evidence and reasoning in an attempt to convince the reader that the author's opinion or position is the right one. Some argument essays also include counterarguments and explain why the counterargument doesn't disprove the author's position. *Driver's Education should be mandatory because it will save lives and money* is an example of an argument essay thesis statement.

Articles: In grammar, articles are a type of determiner and include the words *a, an,* and *the*.

Audience: The audience for a piece of writing is the person or persons the writing is meant to address. Your audience helps determine how you present your ideas and how much you need to explain.

Author-Date System: The author-date system is one of two citation systems within the Chicago/Turabian style. It uses parenthetical in-text citations in combination with a references page.

Base Form: The base form of a verb is the verb in its simplest form, or the form you would look up in a dictionary. For example, the base form of *to be* is *be*, and the base form of *ran* is *run*.

Bibliography: A bibliography is an alphabetized list of sources that comes at the end of some papers, including those written in author-date system using Chicago/Turabian style. It includes sources that have been cited in-text, but it can

also include sources you consulted but didn't directly cite.

Body Paragraph: Body paragraphs make up the majority of most essays. They each explore a single topic/idea that relates to the essay's thesis or provides other relevant information.

Brainstorming: Brainstorming is a technique for generating new ideas by writing down every thought as it occurs to you. Since the purpose of brainstorming is to generate as many options as possible, no ideas are rejected. Put everything down so you can sort through it later.

Business Letter: A business letter is a formal letter meant to respectfully state your thoughts, observations, or experiences to a representative of a company concerning that company, its employees, its products, or its services.

Cause and Effect Essay: Cause and effect essays seek to explain the relationship between something that happens and what caused it to happen. *Poor management and a disappearing tax base caused the town of Redfield to declare bankruptcy* is an example of a cause and effect thesis.

Chicago/Turabian Style: Chicago/Turabian style is a method of formatting papers and citing sources that's commonly used in disciplines like history, arts, and the humanities. It's also common in the publishing industry.

Clause: A clause is a group of words that has a noun (subject) and a verb (also called a predicate). *James lost his shoes* is an example of a clause as is *which he was currently wearing*.

Classification Essay: Classification essays break down large ideas/topics into categories and explain what goes in each category and why. *The three main kinds of sports fans are casual fans, bandwagoners, and fanatics* could be the thesis of a classification essay.

Clustering: Clustering is a prewriting practice that leads you to visually organize ideas using circles, lines, and any other shapes you chose.

Comma Splice: A comma splice is a grammar error that happens when two independent clauses (complete sentences) are joined together with only a comma, as in *Jennifer went hiking, she saw a bear.*

Compare and Contrast Essay: Compare and contrast essays discuss similarities and differences between two or more things. Sometimes the purpose of such writing is to show that one is better, as in *Classical music is better than modern music because it is more complex and avoids pushing messages on the listener.* Other times, the purpose might be to show understanding of a topic, as in this sample thesis: *Both Conrad and Doyle use high-strung characters and repressed violence to discuss social changes in English society.*

Complete Predicate: A complete predicate contains a verb and other words, including objects and modifiers, as in *The player **leapt for the ball at last**.*

Conclusion: A conclusion is the paragraph or paragraphs at the end of an essay that wrap up the writer's ideas and provide closure. Many conclusions restate the main idea of the paper and revisit the most important supporting ideas. They often include information about the importance or implications of the paper's topic.

Context: Context is background information that helps a reader understand something. It might be historical information, a description of a current situation, or a brief statement of relevant facts. It can also be the situation/setting in which a piece of writing will be used.

Coordinate Adjectives: Coordinate adjectives are two or more adjectives used to describe the same noun. They require a comma between them, as in *The **old, dirty** shirt rested on the floor.*

Coordinating Conjunction: A coordinating conjunction is a joining word that connects similar parts of a sentence, such as items in a list or (with the help of a comma) two independent clauses. There are seven coordinating conjunctions: *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so.* Readers often use the term FANBOYS to remember these seven coordinating conjunctions.

Correlative Conjunctions: Correlative conjunctions work in pairs to join similar items. *Either/or* and *not only/but also* are examples of correlative conjunctions.

Counterarguments: Counterarguments are the opinions and reasoning of the opposing side of an argument. If an author's argument involves legalizing texting while driving, for example, some counterarguments might involve that practice being dangerous and leading to accidents.

Credible Source: A credible source is one that you can reasonably trust to be accurate and honest. When considering credibility, awareness of the author's bias and accuracy is very important.

Critical Reading: When you practice critical reading, you make judgments about the text and analyze the choices and ideas that the author presents.

Definition Essay: A definition essay seeks to explore a more in-depth meaning for a concept that can be difficult to easily define. Things like *equality, justice,* and *true love* work well for these types of essays, but clearly and simply defined words like *shoes* or *furniture* do not. A thesis for a definition essay on *equality* might look like this: *In today's headlong rush to create equality, society often seems to forget essential truths—namely that equality means all people have the same rights, status, and opportunities.*

Dependent Clause: Dependent clauses have a have a noun (subject) and verb (predicate), but they cannot stand alone as a complete sentence. These clauses often include a connecting word that links them to an independent clause. Dependent clauses can also act like a part of speech, taking the place of a noun, adjective, or adverb. *When I went outside* is an example of a dependent clause.

Descriptive Essay: Descriptive essays attempt to provide enough vivid details so readers can clearly imagine what's being described. Sensory information like sights and sounds often play a big part in such essays. *My campground graduation party was a blur of loud music, wonderful food, and all the scents of nature* could be a descriptive essay's thesis.

Determiner: Determiners are words that come before nouns and mark traits like number and possession, such as *more, every,* and *my*.

Digital Portfolio: A digital portfolio is a collection of your work as a writer that shows your progress over time, using links to demonstrate your growth in different areas. Digital portfolios may be required for some classes, program completion,

and certain types of employment.

Draft: A draft is a version of a piece of writing. Early drafts tend to be full of ideas that need revision and structure, and later drafts take those ideas and develop them into more complete papers.

Editing: Editing a paper involves altering sentences and phrases so they are more understandable and accessible to improve how smoothly and clearly the paper reads.

Essay: An essay is a piece of writing meant to inform or persuade the reader. The exact characteristics depend on the essay type, which can range from persuasive to narrative.

Essential Element: An essential element (also called a restrictive element) is a phrase or clause that's required for the sentence to be understood, as in *The test **that was scheduled for Saturday** has been cancelled.* Essential elements aren't separated from the main sentence by commas.

Ethos: Ethos is the amount of credibility an author has. Authors often demonstrate ethos by relating their qualifications and expertise to write within their specialty.

Exemplification Essay: An exemplification essay (also called an illustrative essay) uses specific, real-world examples to illustrate a point or concept. *The recent outbreak of vandalism at this college is a sign of the current trend toward disrespect of private property* could be the thesis for an exemplification essay.

Explication: Explication is the close analysis of each part of a piece of writing as it appears within the text. It's often used when writing about poetry, but it can also be used for close readings of prose.

First Person: First-person point of view is a writing style that makes the writer part of the text, as in ***I** went outside*. While some academic assignments may allow or even require the use of first person, most discourage it.

Freewriting: Freewriting is the practice of writing without considering phrasing, diction, or organization. The purpose of freewriting is to force the writer to quickly and naturally generate ideas that can be developed and refined later.

Gerund: A gerund is a noun made by adding *-ing* to the end of a verb; a gerund may look like a verb form but doesn't function as one. The word *running* is a gerund in the sentence ***Running** keeps the heart healthy.*

Header: A header is additional information that appears at the top of each page in a paper. Different style guides like MLA and APA have different rules for what information belongs in the header.

Helping Verbs: Helping verbs are needed to express complex information about the time or mood of the main verb. *I **must** find my dog* and *We **are** running out of time* both feature helping verbs.

Illustrative Essay: An illustrative essay (also called an exemplification essay) uses specific, real-world examples to make a point or explain a concept. *The recent outbreak of vandalism at this college is a sign of the current trend of widespread*

disrespect toward personal property could be the thesis of an illustrative essay.

Independent Clause: Independent clauses have a noun (subject), verb (predicate), and can stand alone as a complete sentence, as in *Susan tossed her keys on the ground.*

In-Text Citation: An in-text citation serves as an introductory reference to a source that has been quoted or paraphrased within a work. These citations appear in the body of the text itself, directing readers to the more complete publication information in the bibliographic list at the end of the work. The exact rules for citations depend on your citation style (MLA, APA, etc.).

Introduction: An introduction is an opening paragraph or paragraphs that set the context for an essay's topic. They typically give some background information about the topic and include a thesis statement. Some introductions also use attention-grabbing techniques like quotes, anecdotes, or surprising statistics to help interest the reader in the topic.

Introductory Element: An introductory element is additional information at the beginning of a sentence that isn't part of the main idea or point of the sentence. It generally requires a comma separating it from the main clause. ***After the storm,*** *all the trees were uprooted* has an introductory phrase.

Inverted Pyramid: The inverted pyramid technique is a way of writing introductions that begins with general information about your topic and becomes more specific as the introduction continues.

Journaling: Journaling is the practice of keeping notes about your thoughts, reactions, and ideas so you can use them in assignments.

Keyword: Keywords are terms (often from thesis statements and topic sentences) that relate to important concepts or topics within a paper. They are also terms you can type into search engines when researching for a topic or topics you wish to write about.

Linking Verbs: Linking verbs connect a sentence's subject to a word in the predicate that completes the subject's meaning. *Quinn **was** captain of the ship* and *Damien **appears** quite tired* both feature linking verbs.

Literary Analysis: A literary analysis paper closely examines one or more works (including short stories, novels, and other creative works) and makes a claim about that work. The nature of the claim can vary greatly from paper to paper, but it usually includes an interpretation or arguable ideas as its thesis rather than a direct statement of fact or simple description. It incorporates quotes and paraphrased material from the work(s) to support this central claim. *The Color of Magic uses characterization and symbolism to explore the absurdity of oblivious first-world travelers* could be the thesis for a literary analysis essay.

Literary Device: A literary device is a technique that an author uses, such as setting, characterization, imagery, symbolism, or irony, to convey a theme or to make the writing more vivid or effective.

Literature Review: A literature review discusses the ideas and findings of a variety of credible sources on a given topic. It usually serves to give the readers an idea of what has been studied and understood up to this point. Although sometimes created as stand-alone documents, literature reviews are also found in

longer reports or papers in which the writer will also include new information or analysis on the topic.

Logos: Logos represents the use of reason and evidence in a piece of writing. It might include logical arguments, provable facts, and clear, cohesive discussion of a main topic.

Memo: Formally called memorandums, memos are short, direct business notes that communicate essential information about a topic.

Mind Map: A mind map is a prewriting practice that leads you to visually connect ideas and develop relationships between concepts.

MLA Style: MLA style is a method of formatting papers and citing sources that's commonly used in humanities courses.

Narrative: Narrative writing tells a story and describes events. While narratives usually don't have a traditional thesis, they often have a unifying idea or message, like *Leaving my childhood home was a painful time in my life, but it opened new doors for me.*

Nominative Pronoun: A nominative pronoun can act as the subject of a clause, as in ***She*** *found the map.*

Nonessential Element: A nonessential element (also called a nonrestrictive element) is a phrase that isn't required for the sentence to be understood, as in *Tomorrow's event,* ***which many people were anticipating,*** *has been cancelled.* Nonessential elements need to be separated from the main sentence by commas.

Notes System: The notes system is one of two citation systems within the Chicago/Turabian style. It uses superscript numbers with footnotes or endnotes in combination with a bibliography to cite sources.

Noun Clause: A dependent clause that acts as a noun is called a noun clause. ***Whoever finishes the test first*** *will get five extra points* is a sentence with a noun clause.

Objective Pronoun: Objective pronouns act as the object of a verb or a preposition, as in *The last question caused* ***him*** *to falter.*

Organizational/Corporate Author: An organizational or corporate author refers to an entire organization that composes a source, in contrast to a single author or group of authors. As such, the organization itself is treated as the author. Documents produced by government agencies, businesses, and large academic organizations often have an organizational/corporate author.

Paper Unity: Paper unity occurs when the ideas in a paper are all related by a common purpose or topic with every idea being relevant to the main idea presented in the thesis.

Paragraph Unity: Paragraph unity happens when the information in a single paragraph is all related to the main topic of that paragraph. Unified paragraphs help readers see how ideas are related.

Paraphrase: To paraphrase is to rephrase something from a source using your own words. When you paraphrase, you keep the ideas/information from the source but use your own phrasing. For papers written in MLA style and Chicago/Turabian, paraphrased material needs to be cited in-text every bit as much as direct quotations. However, for APA-style papers, a signal phrase is sufficient if readers can easily locate the paraphrased material within its original source. If readers are likely to need help locating the original information in the source, add the in-text citation.

Participles: Participles are adjectives made from verbs, as in *a **running** man*, *those **blossoming** flowers,* an ***annoyed** parent,* or *the **lost** child.*

Passive Voice: The passive voice involves someone or something acting upon the subject of a sentence. It must include a *to be* verb and a past participle, as in *The game **was lost** yesterday*.

Pathos: Pathos is an author's use of emotional appeals to a reader. It might involve evoking anger, sympathy, hope, or any other passion that helps emotionally connect the reader to the topic.

Point of View: In writing, point of view determines the kind of pronouns that are used. The main points of view are first, second, or third person.

Possessive Pronoun: Possessive pronouns show ownership, as in *his, hers, their,* and *our.*

Predicate: A predicate is the verb and related words that express the action or state of being of the clause's subject, as in as in *She **walked*** and *The cat **was asleep***.

Primary Source: A primary source is a document, object, communication, or other material from the time period or issue you're studying. This can be anything from original research you've done to a novel you're writing about.

Process Essay: Process essays give detailed explanations of how to do something by breaking each step down for the reader in chronological order. *Replacing a bad ethernet card is as easy as picking the right replacement, opening up your computer, removing the old card, putting the new one in, and closing the computer back up* could be a process thesis.

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement: Pronoun-antecedent agreement occurs when a pronoun and the noun it refers back to match in number, as in ***John** couldn't remember where **he** left his keys*. When pronouns lack agreement with their nouns, errors result, as in *If a **student** misses class, **they** will have to make up the test on the following day.*

Proofread: Proofreading is a careful examination of a draft to find typos, missing words, misspellings, and other surface-level errors.

Proposal: Proposals suggest a course of action in a business or academic setting. Although the content varies depending on the proposal type, they usually outline the work or research to be done, how it will be done, who will do it, and the overall purpose of the work/research.

Purpose: The purpose of a piece of writing reflects the overall goal of the writer. A

few common purposes are to persuade, inform, describe, compare, and analyze.

Quote: A quote is taken directly from a source, word‑for‑word. Short quotes need to be enclosed in quotation marks: "This is a sample quote." They also need to be cited within the text, following rules from the citation style (MLA, APA, Chicago/Turabian) that the paper is using.

Reflexive Pronoun: A reflexive pronoun functions as the object of a verb in a sentence in which the subject is the same as the object, as in *I looked in the mirror and saw **myself.***

Reference Page: A reference page is an alphabetized list of every source cited within a paper as well as additional publishing information about each source. In APA and Chicago/Turabian papers using the author-date system, the list appears on a separate page at the end of the document with the title *References* (without italics) centered at the top. In contrast, MLA-style papers usually list resources on a page titled *Works Cited* (without italics), and Chicago/Turbian papers using the notes system end with a page titled *Bibliography* (without italics).

Revise: Revising a paper or project means to engage in-depth with an essay's content to rewrite another draft of it. Doing so lets you introduce new ideas and ways of organizing and presenting information.

Rhetorical Analysis: A rhetorical analysis looks at how effective or appealing a piece of persuasive writing is based on its appeal to reason (logos), credibility (ethos), and emotion (pathos). *This political commercial uses strong ethos and pathos to persuade the viewer, but it has minimal logos backing up its points* could be a rhetorical analysis thesis statement.

Run-on Sentence: A run‑on sentence is a grammar error that happens when two otherwise complete sentences are joined without the proper punctuation and joining words, as in *Terry left the door open the cats got out*. The sentence should read *Terry left the door open**, so** the cats got out.*

Secondary Source: A secondary source comments on or analyzes a primary source. An academic paper discussing symbolism in a novel would be an example of a secondary source.

Second Person: Second-person point of view puts the reader directly into the text, as in ***You** must measure the board twice before cutting*. It's sometimes used in creative writing and giving instructions. While it may be allowed for some assignments, most academic writing discourages the use of second person.

Sentence Fragment: A sentence fragment is a series of words that are presented as a complete sentence but that can't stand on its own. The three main causes of sentence fragments are missing subjects, missing predicates, and dependent clauses that aren't paired with an independent clause.

Supporting Sentence: Supporting sentences are usually found in body paragraphs. They provide additional information like details, evidence, and examples to help support the topic sentence and ensure readers understand what the paragraph is about.

Simple Predicate: A simple predicate is a predicate made up of only verbs and joining words, as in *The fire **sputtered and died.***

Source: A source is a piece of written or recorded information that you use to support your ideas in a paper. Scholarly journals, news articles, movies, websites, and virtually any other form of media can be used as a source. Of course, not all sources of information are trustworthy, and most assignments require that your sources be credible, so choose your sources carefully.

Style: Style refers to how you arrange your words and compose your ideas; it's how you convey the substance of your story.

Subject: The subject is the noun(s) or pronoun(s) either performing an action or being described by the predicate, as in **She** walked in the rain and The **cat** was asleep.

Subject-Verb Agreement: Subject-verb agreement occurs when the subject and verb match in number, as in **Alice runs** quickly and The **students run** quickly. Lack of subject-verb agreement is a common grammar error.

Subordinating Conjunction: A subordinating conjunction is a joining word that connects dissimilar parts of a sentence. Subordinating conjunctions often begin dependent clauses. While, despite, and because are common subordinating conjunctions, but there are many more.

Supporting Points: Supporting points are the major ideas that help give your claim credibility. A paper arguing for a lower speed limit on highways might have supporting points like it will reduce the number of accidents and it will result in fewer serious injuries when accidents do happen.

Thesis/Thesis Statement: A thesis statement is the main idea that you are trying to explain, prove, or discuss in your essay. Depending on the type of essay, it might take the form of a position on an argument, a comparison of two or more things, or a description of a situation. Thesis statements are usually a single sentence and act as a simplified roadmap to an essay. After reading a thesis statement, a reader should understand what a paper is about and what you are planning to say about the topic.

Third Person: Third-person point of view talks about other people and things without directly referring to either the writer or reader, as in The **researchers** collected data or **They** chose to release it all at once. Third person is the most common point of view for most academic writing.

Tone: Tone represents how something is written based on the author's attitude about his or her topic. It reflects what the author thinks and wants to convey about that topic.

Topic: Your topic is what your paper is about. You might begin with a general topic like the environment and then move to a more specific topic like how recycling reduces pollution.

Topic Sentence: A topic sentence begins a body paragraph by introducing the main idea of that paragraph.

Transitions: Transitions are words and phrases that help readers move smoothly from one idea to another. They can often be found in topic sentences, but they can also be used to show the relationship between two pieces of information within a single paragraph. First of all, despite this, and at the same time are all examples of

transitions.

Verb Tense: Verb tense determines when a verb happens in time. While there are many different tenses, they largely indicate whether something **happened** in the past, **happens** in the present, or **will happen** in the future.

Verb Tense Shift: This kind of shift occurs when a passage begins in one tense and then switches to another without reason. When a shift happens unintentionally, it often makes what is being described or discussed confusing. *I **walked** outside and **see** my neighbor on her porch* is an example of a tense shift from past tense *walked* to present tense *see*.

Voice: Voice is the individual writing style that makes each author unique. Voice comes from choices about subject matter and ways of approaching a topic. Devices like sentence length, rhythm, and word choice contribute to a writer's voice.

Works Cited: This page contains a list of sources that comes at the end of MLA-style essays. It includes the title, *Works Cited* (without italics) centered at the top and, below that, an alphabetical list of every source cited in the text, as well as additional information about each source.

Top 10 Writing Concerns

The corrections modeled below can guide you as you edit for similar sentence-level concerns in your own writing.

1. Commas After Introductory Elements
Placing a comma after an introductory word, phrase, or clause enables your reader to understand where that sentence element ends and your main clause begins.

Introductory Word
Incorrect: ***Historically*** *master thief Marco Meloni has resisted the idea of working with other criminals.*
Revised: ***Historically***, *master thief Marco Meloni has resisted the idea of working with other criminals.*

Introductory Phrase
Incorrect: ***Meeting the very adept El Jalapeno*** *Marco agrees to collaborate on the ultimate heist—the theft of the mammoth Pink Tiger chili pepper.*
Revised: ***Meeting the very adept El Jalapeno***, *Marco agrees to collaborate on the ultimate heist—the theft of the mammoth Pink Tiger chili pepper.*

Introductory Series of Prepositional Phrases
Incorrect: ***Through a skylight of the Empire Pepper plant*** *the thieving pair lower a climbing rope.*
Revised: ***Through a skylight of the Empire Pepper plant***, *the thieving pair lower a climbing rope.*

Introductory Clause
Incorrect: ***As Marco begins his descent into the factory*** *the security alarm blares.*
Revised: ***As Marco begins his descent into the factory***, *the security alarm blares.*

More information about using commas after introductory elements can be found in [Commas](#).

2. Comma Splices
The comma that joins two independent clauses into a comma splice creates an inadequate pause that causes the sentence's complete ideas to run together in a confusing manner. You can edit this sentence structure in different ways based on your intended meaning. Replacing the comma with a period creates two distinct ideas. Joining the independent clauses with a semicolon or combining them into a compound or complex sentence allows you to express a closer or clearer relationship between them.

Incorrect: *Marco reaches up instinctively to return to the **roof, his** leather gloves begin to slip downward.*

Period
Revised: *Marco reaches up instinctively to return to the **roof. His** leather gloves begin to slip downward.*

Semicolon
Revised: *Marco reaches up instinctively to return to the **roof; his** leather gloves begin to slip downward.*

Compound Sentence

Revised (with coordinating conjunction): *Marco reaches up instinctively to return to the **roof, but** his leather gloves begin to slip downward.*
Revised (with semicolon and conjunctive adverb): *Marco reaches up instinctively to return to the **roof; however, his** leather gloves begin to slip downward.*

Complex Sentence
Revised (turning one independent clause into a dependent clause): ***Though** Marco reaches up instinctively to return to the **roof, his** leather gloves begin to slip downward.*

For more help with identifying and editing comma splices, see [Comma Splices and Run-ons](#).

3. Run-on Sentences
A run-on sentence fuses independent clauses into a single sentence without an appropriate punctuation mark or conjunction. You can use a period between the two sentences to set boundaries, or you can use one of the other options mentioned below.

Incorrect: *El Jalapeno is pouring hot pepper oil down the **rope he** wants to escape by forcing Marco's capture.*

Period
Revised: *El Jalapeno is pouring hot pepper oil down the **rope. He** wants to escape by forcing Marco's capture.*

Semicolon
Revised: *El Jalapeno is pouring hot pepper oil down the **rope; he** wants to escape by forcing Marco's capture.*

Compound Sentence
Revised (with coordinating conjunction): *El Jalapeno is pouring hot pepper oil down the **rope, for he** wants to escape by forcing Marco's capture.*
Revised (with semicolon and conjunctive adverb): *El Jalapeno is pouring hot pepper oil down the **rope; undoubtedly, he** wants to escape by forcing Marco's capture.*

Complex Sentence
Revised (turning one independent clause into a dependent clause): *El Jalapeno is pouring hot pepper oil down the **rope because he** wants to escape by forcing Marco's capture.*

You can find more information about eliminating run-on sentences in [Comma Splices and Run-ons](#).

4. Sentence Fragments
A sentence fragment is missing part of the structure it needs to express a complete idea. Editing this incorrect sentence structure involves adding the absent information—a subject (*noun*); a predicate (*verb*); or, in the case of a dependent clause, an independent clause that makes it part of a stand-alone sentence.

Missing Subject (*Noun*)
Incorrect: *Silently curses his faithless collaborator.*
Revised: ***Marco** silently curses his faithless collaborator.*

Missing Predicate (*Verb*)
Incorrect: *El Jalepeno's shadowy form away from the frame of the skylight.*

Revised: *El Jalepeno's shadowy form* **backs** *away from the frame of the skylight.*

Dependent Clause
Incorrect: *As he watches El Jalapeno recede.*
Revised: *As he watches El Jalapeno recede,* ***Marco is sure that the villain's outline glows with a spicy aura.***

For more help eliminating sentence fragments, see [Fragments](#).

5. Commas Before Coordinating Conjunctions in Compound Sentences
When you insert a comma before the coordinating conjunction in a compound sentence, you enable the reader to see and understand both independent clauses that comprise it.

Incorrect: *El Jalapeno has faded from above* **so** *Marco turns his gaze downward.*
Revised: *El Jalapeno has faded from above* **, so** *Marco turns his gaze downward.*

Incorrect: *A woman in a police uniform stands at the foot of the climbing rope* **and** *beneath the brim of her cap, her eyes flicker in anticipation.*
Revised: *A woman in a police uniform stands at the foot of the climbing rope* **, and** *beneath the brim of her cap, her eyes flicker in anticipation.*

You can find more information about using commas in compound sentences in [Commas](#).

6. Subject-Verb Agreement
You should pair a singular subject with a singular verb and a plural subject with a plural verb. *Compound subjects*, which consist of two or more nouns joined by coordinating conjunctions, apply the same essential rule: A compound subject joined by *and* is considered plural and takes a plural verb. When the nouns of a compound subject are joined by *or* or *nor,* the verb should agree in number with the part of the subject closer to it.

Singular Subject
Incorrect: *Marco's* **heart race** *faster.*
Revised: *Marco's* **heart races** *faster.*

Plural Subject With Information Between Subject and Verb
Incorrect: *The shrill* **tones** *from the alarm* **seems** *to grow louder.*
Revised: *The shrill* **tones** *from the alarm* **seem** *to grow louder.*

Compound Subject Joined With *And*
Incorrect: ***Anxiety and fear fills*** *Marco's chest.*
Revised: ***Anxiety and fear fill*** *Marco's chest.*

Compound Subject Joined With *Or*
Incorrect: ***Tears or sweat flood*** *his eyes.*
Revised: ***Tears or sweat floods*** *his eyes.*
Revised: ***Sweat or tears flood*** *his eyes.*

More help creating subject-verb agreement can be found in [Subject-Verb Agreement](#).

7. Inconsistent Verb Tense
When you're discussing a specific time period such as the present or past, using verbs that reflect that time frame helps your reader follow along. Change your verb

tenses only if you are describing actions that occur in different periods of time.

Necessary Present Tense
Incorrect: *Marco now **blinks** and **observed** the officer's smile.*
Revised: *Marco now **blinks** and **observes** the officer's smile.*

Necessary Past Tense
Incorrect: *Ten years in the past, he **encounters** a woman who **flashed** this same smile.*
Revised: *Ten years in the past, he **encountered** a woman who **flashed** this same smile.*

Appropriate Tense Shift
Incorrect: *Today, as he **dangles** above her, he **remembers** when they **meet** in a truffle vault so long ago.*
Revised: *Today, as he **dangles** above her, he **remembers** when they **met** in a truffle vault so long ago.*

You can access more information about maintaining appropriate verb tense in [Verb Tense Shifts](#).

8. Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement
The English language is a living thing, and, like all living things, it changes over time. Though in the past it was **incorrect** to use the pronoun *they* when referring to a single person in a sentence, writers now have a variety of pronoun options that still agree with the antecedents they replace (male, female, or non-binary and gender non-conforming). While "they" has long been considered a plural pronoun, many style guides now allow the use of "they" as a singular pronoun for this reason. Still, the simplest way to ensure that you use inclusive pronouns and remain sensitive to others is to use a plural noun and pronoun.

- ***Students** may resubmit **their** drafts for a second review.*

Number
To agree in *number*, a pronoun and its antecedent should both be singular or plural (which now includes the gender neutral/non-binary singular use of *they*).

Masculine Singular: *The **principal** attended the conference where **he** learned ways to improve **his** approach to discipline.*

Feminine Singular: *The **principal** attended the conference where **she** learned ways to improve **her** approach to discipline.*

Gender Neutral or Non-Binary Singular: *The **principal** attended the conference where **they** learned ways to improve **their** approaches to discipline.*

Plural: *The **principals** attended the conference where **they** learned ways to improve **their** approaches to discipline.*

Gender
To agree regarding *gender*, the pronoun should match the antecedent's gender (or gender identity), meaning male, female, or gender neutral/non-binary.

Male: ***Jack** found **himself** without a sled after the biggest snowfall in years.*

Female: **Rita** found **herself** without a sled after the biggest snowfall in years.

Gender Neutral or Non-Binary: **Jack** found **themselves** without a sled after the biggest snowfall in years.

Person
To agree in *person*, make sure that the pronoun is taking a form appropriate for its antecedent. If it refers to a person, use a personal pronoun such as *he/she/they*. If the antecedent is an object, use *it/they*.

Incorrect: *Renee checked, and **the school** lists courses for **her** entire academic year*.

Revised: *Renee checked, and **the school** lists courses for **its** entire academic year*.

For more help with pronoun-antecedent agreement, see [Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement](#).

9. Apostrophe Placement in Singular and Plural Possessive Nouns
The appropriate use of apostrophes keeps a reader from confusing plural and possessive nouns. To create the possessive form of a singular noun or of a plural noun that does not end in *-s*, you should add an apostrophe and an *-s*. When a plural noun already ends in *-s,* form the possessive by adding an apostrophe after the *-s.*

Singular Possessive
Incorrect: *Marco emerges from his reverie to realize that his rope has become as slick as a **firemans** pole; the dangling **criminals** grip can no longer hold.*
Revised: *Marco emerges from his reverie to realize that his rope has become as slick as a **fireman's** pole; the dangling **criminal's** grip can no longer hold.*

Plural Possessive
Incorrect: *Aided by the **glove's** oily palms, Marco manages a swashbuckling descent that would cause all **womens'** hearts—not just that of his lady love—to swell.*
Revised: *Aided by the **gloves'** oily palms, Marco manages a swashbuckling descent that would cause all **women's** hearts—not just that of his lady love—to swell.*

You can locate more information about apostrophe use in [Apostrophes](#).

10. Inconsistent Point of View
An essay's point of view should reflect its purpose and tone and the way they influence your need to direct the reader's attention to the writer (*first person*), the audience (*second person*), or the essay's driving ideas (*third person*). Third person is usually preferred for objective, academic writing. Unless the meaning of a sentence requires a change in perspective, you should keep point of view consistent to keep a reader's focus consistent.

Shift Between First and Third Person
Incorrect: *The wifely embrace into which Marco finally settles makes **the storyteller** certain of the moral of **my** tale.*
Revised (first person): *The wifely embrace into which Marco finally settles makes **me** certain of the moral of **my** tale.*
Revised (third person): *The wifely embrace into which Marco finally settles*

*makes **the storyteller** certain of the moral of **this** tale.*

Shift Between Second and Third Person
Incorrect: **One** *cannot predict who will be* **your** *most faithful partner.*
Revised (second person): **You** *cannot predict who will be* **your** *most faithful partner.*
Revised (third person): **One** *cannot predict who will be* **his or her** *most faithful partner.*

More ideas about using appropriate and consistent point of view can be found in [Point of View](#).

Verb Tenses

Tense	Affirmative		Negative		Interrogative	
Simple Present	*I **love** my basset hound, Mort.*	subject + present tense of main verb	*I **do** not **love** my basset hound, Mort.*	subject + present tense of verb *to do* + *not* + base form of main verb	***Do** I **love** my basset hound, Mort?*	present tense of verb *to do* + subject + base form of main verb
Present Progressive	*I **am feeding** Mort organic chow.*	subject + present tense of verb *to be* + present participle of main verb	*I **am** not **feeding** Mort organic chow.*	subject + present tense of verb *to be* + *not* + present participle of main verb	***Am** I **feeding** Mort organic chow?*	present tense of verb *to be* + subject + present participle of main verb

	Statement	Formula	Negative	Formula	Question	Formula
Present Perfect	*Mort* **has consumed** *a whole tub of cookie dough.*	subject + present tense of verb *to have* + past participle of main verb	*Mort* **has** *not* **consumed** *a whole tub of cookie dough.*	subject + present tense of verb *to have* + *not* + past participle of main verb	**Has** *Mort* **consumed** *a whole tub of cookie dough?*	present tense of verb *to have* + subject + past participle of main verb
Present Perfect Progressive	*Mort* **has been looking** *unwell.*	subject + present tense of verb *to have* + *been* + present participle of main verb	*Mort* **has** *not* **been looking** *unwell*	subject + present tense of verb *to have* + *not* + *been* + present participle of main verb	**Has** *Mort* **been looking** *unwell?*	present tense of verb *to have* + subject + *been* + present participle of main verb
Simple Past	*I* **took** *Mort to the vet.*	subject + past tense of main verb	*I* **did** *not* **take** *Mort to the vet.*	subject + *did* + *not* + base form of main verb	**Did** *I* **take** *Mort to the vet?*	*did* + subject + base form of main verb
Past Progressive	*The vet* **was trying** *to give Mort a shot.*	subject + past tense of *to be* + present participle of main verb	*The vet* **was** *not* **trying** *to give Mort a shot*	subject + past tense of *to be* + *not* + present participle of main verb	**Was** *the vet* **trying** *to give Mort a shot?*	past tense of *to be* + subject + present participle of main verb
Past Perfect	*Mort* **had** *always* **enjoyed** *visiting the vet.*	subject + *had* + past participle of main verb	*Mort* **had** *not always* **enjoyed** *visited the vet.*	subject + *had* + *not* + past participle of main verb	**Had** *Mort always* **enjoyed** *visiting the vet?*	*had* + subject + past participle of main verb
Past Perfect Progressive	*I* **had been distracting** *Mort with a chew toy.*	subject + *had* + *been* + present participle of main verb	*I* **had** *not* **been distracting** *Mort with a chew toy.*	subject + *had* + *not* + *been* + present participle of main verb	**Had** *I* **been distracting** *Mort with a chew toy?*	*had* + subject + *been* + present participle of main

						verb
Simple Future	*I **will be** more careful with tubs of cookie dough.*	subject + will + base form of main verb	*I **will** not **be** more careful with tubs of cookie dough.*	subject + will + *not* + base form of main verb	***Will** I **be** more careful with tubs of cookie dough?*	*will* + subject + base form of main verb
Future Progressive	*I **will be watching** Mort like a hawk.*	subject + will + be + present participle of main verb	*I **will** not **be watching** Mort like a hawk.*	subject + will + *not* + be + present participle of main verb	***Will** I **be watching** Mort like a hawk?*	*will* + subject + be + present participle of main verb
Future Perfect	*Mort **will have devoured** his last tub of cookie dough.*	subject + will + have + past participle of main verb	*Mort **will** not **have devoured** his last tub of cookie dough.*	subject + will + *not* + have + past participle of main verb	***Will** Mort **have devoured** his last tub of cookie dough?*	*will* + subject + have + past participle of main verb
Future Perfect Progressive	*I **will have been taking** him for exhaustive daily walks.*	subject + will + have + been + present participle of main verb	*I **will** not **have been taking** him for exhaustive daily walks.*	subject + will + *not* + have + been + present participle of main verb	***Will** I **have been taking** him for exhaustive daily walks?*	*will* + subject + have + been + present participle of main verb
Conditional Simple	*If he were younger, Mort **would love** to live in a bakery.*	*if* clause + subject + *would* + base form of main verb	*If the machines were noisy, Mort **would** not **love** to live in a bakery.*	*if* clause + subject + *would* + *not* + base form of main verb	*If he had a choice, **would** Mort **love** to live in a bakery?*	*if* clause + *would* + subject + base form of main verb
Conditional Progressive	*If Mort lived in a bakery, he **would be prowling** through the foodstuffs.*	*if* clause + subject + *would* + be + present participle of main verb	*If Mort lived in a bakery, he **would** not **be prowling** through the foodstuffs.*	*if* clause + subject + *would* + *not* + be + present participle of main verb	*If he were better trained, **would** he still **be prowling** through the foodstuffs?*	*if* clause + *would* + subject + be + present participle of main verb
Conditional	*If Mort had lived at the bakery, the*	*if* clause + subject + *would* +	*If Mort had lived at the bakery, the*	*if* clause + subject + *would* + n	*If Mort had lived at the bakery, **woul***	*If* clause + *woul*

Perfect	baker **would have lost** customers.	have + past participle of main verb	baker **would** not **have lost** customers	ot + have + past participle of main verb	d the baker **have lost** customers?	d + subject + have + past participle of main verb
Conditional Perfect Progressive	If Mort had been there during the break-in, he **would have been hiding** in the shadows.	if clause + subject + would + have + been + present participle of main verb	If Mort had been there during the break-in, he **would** not **have been hiding** in the shadows.	if clause + subject + would + not + have + been + present participle of main verb	If Mort had been there during the break-in, **would** he **have been hiding**?	if clause + would + subject + have + been + present participle of main verb

Irregular Verbs

Base Form	Present Tense	Past Tense	Past Participle
arise	arise/arises	arose	arisen
be	am/is	was/were	been
bear	bear/bears	bore	borne/born
become	become/becomes	became	become
bend	bend/bends	bent	bent
begin	begin/begins	began	begun
bite	bite/bites	bit	bitten/bit
bleed	bleed/bleeds	bled	bled
blow	blow/blows	blew	blown
break	break/breaks	broke	broken
bring	bring/brings	brought	brought
build	build/builds	built	built
buy	buy/buys	bought	bought

cast	cast/casts	cast	cast
catch	catch/catches	caught	caught
choose	choose/chooses	chose	chosen
come	come/comes	came	come
cost	cost/costs	cost	cost
creep	creep/creeps	crept	crept
cut	cut/cuts	cut	cut
deal	deal/deals	dealt	dealt
dig	dig/digs	dug	dug
dive	dive/dives	dived/dove	dived
do	do/does	did	done
draw	draw/draws	drew	drawn
dream	dream/dreams	dreamed/dreamt	dreamt
drink	drink/drinks	drank	drunk
drive	drive/drives	drove	driven
eat	eat/eats	ate	eaten
fall	fall/falls	fell	fallen
fight	fight/fights	fought	fought
find	find/finds	found	found
fly	fly/flies	flew	flown
forget	forget/forgets	forgot	forgotten
forgive	forgive/forgives	forgave	forgiven
freeze	freeze/freezes	froze	frozen
get	get/gets	got	gotten
give	give/gives	gave	given
go	go/goes	went	gone
grow	grow/grows	grew	grown
hang	hang/hangs	hung/hanged	hung/hanged
hide	hide/hides	hid	hidden
hold	hold/holds	held	held
hurt	hurt/hurts	hurt	hurt
keep	keep/keeps	kept	kept
kneel	kneel/kneels	knelt	knelt
know	know/knows	knew	known
lay	lay/lays	laid	laid
lead	lead/leads	led	led
leave	leave/leaves	left	left
lie	lie/lies	lay	lain
light	light/lights	lit	lit
lose	lose/loses	lost	lost

make	make/makes	made	made
mean	mean/means	meant	meant
meet	meet/meets	met	met
pay	pay/pays	paid	paid
prove	prove/proves	proved	proven
put	put/puts	put	put
quit	quit/quit	quit	quit
read	read/reads	read	read
rid	rid/rids	rid	rid
ride	ride/rides	rode	ridden
ring	ring/rings	rang	rung
rise	rise/rises	rose	risen
run	run/runs	ran	run
say`	say/says	said	said
see	see/sees	saw	seen
seek	seek/seeks	sought	sought
sell	sell/sells	sold	sold
set	set/sets	set	set
sew	sew/sews	sewed	sewn
shake	shake/shakes	shook	shaken
shear	shear/shears	sheared	shorn
shed	shed/sheds	shed	shed
shine	shine/shines	shone	shone
shoot	shoot/shoots	shot	shot
show	show/shows	showed	shown
sing	sing/sings	sang	sung
sink	sink/sinks	sank	sunk
sit	sit/sits	sat	sat
sleep	sleep/sleeps	slept	slept
slide	slide/slides	slid	slid
speak	speak/speaks	spoke	spoken
spin	spin/spins	spun	spun
spring	spring/springs	sprang	sprung
stand	stand/stands	stood	stood
steal	steal/steals	stole	stolen
stick	stick/sticks	stuck	stuck
sting	sting/stings	stung	stung
stink	stink/stinks	stank/stunk	stunk
strike	strike/strikes	struck	struck
string	string/strings	strung	strung

strive	strive/strives	strove/strived	striven/strived
swear	swear/swears	swore	sworn
swim	swim/swims	swam	swum
swing	swing/swings	swung	swung
take	take/takes	took	taken
teach	teach/teaches	taught	taught
tear	tear/tears	tore	torn
tell	tell/tells	told	told
think	think/thinks	thought	thought
throw	throw/throws	threw	thrown
understand	understand/understands	understood	understood
wake	wake/wakes	woke/waked	woken/waked/woke
wear	wear/wears	wore	worn
weave	weave/weaves	wove/weaved	woven
weep	weep/weeps	wept	wept
win	win/wins	won	won
write	write/writes	wrote	written

Conditional Verb Tenses

Example	Conditional Meaning	*If* Clause		Results Clause	
		Dependent Clause	Pattern	Independent Clause	Pattern
If I **brush** *my teeth regularly, I* **get** *good dental checkups.*	always true in the present	*If I* **brush** *my teeth regularly,*	*If* + subject + present tense of verb	*I* **get** *good dental checkups.*	subject + present tense of verb
If you **refuse** *to floss, you* **will get** *gingivitis.*	true in the present	*If you* **refuse** *to floss,*	*If* + subject + present tense of verb	*you* **will get** *gingivitis.*	subject + future tense of verb
If she **forgets** *to wear her retainer, her teeth* **may become** *crooked.*	true in the present; perhaps true in the future	*If she* **forgets** *to wear her retainer,*	*If* + subject + present tense of verb	*her teeth* **may become** *crooked.*	subject + might/may/could / should + base form of main verb
If I **had** *a million dollars, I* **would give** *half to*	not true in the present, but	*If I* **had** *a million dollars,*	*If* + subject + past	*I* **would give** *half to charity.*	subject + would/could/might + base form of main verb

charity.	perhaps true in the future		tense of verb		
If I **were** rich, I **could start** a charitable foundation.	not true in the present, but perhaps true in the future	If I **were** rich,	If + subject + wer e	I **could start** a charitable foundation.	subject + would/could/mig ht + base form of main verb
If Cosmo **had followed** a schedule, he **might have completed** hi s project on time.	not true in the past and never can be true	If Cosmo **had followed** a schedule,	If + subjec t + past perfect tense of verb	he **might have completed** hi s project on time.	subject + would/could/mig ht + have + past participle of main verb

Common Homophones and Homonyms

accept/except	fair/fare	poor/pore/pour
advice/advise	for/fore	principal/principle
aid/aide	grate/great	profit/prophet
aisle/isle	hear/here	rap/wrap
allusion/illusion	its/it's	role/roll
altar/alter	know/no	sail/sale
bare/bear	lead/led	scene/seen
base/bass	lessen/lesson	seam/seem
brake/break	maid/made	shear/sheer
buy/by/bye	miner/minor	soar/sore
capital/capitol	one/won	son/sun
cent/scent/sent	pail/pale	stair/stare
cite/sight/site	pair/pare/pear	stake/steak
complement/compliment	paced/paste	stationary/stationery
council/counsel	passed/past	team/teem
discreet/discrete	patience/patients	threw/through
dual/duel	peace/piece	tide/tied
elicit/illicit	plain/plane	waist/waste
eminent/imminent/immanent	miner/minor	weather/whether/rather

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